

Testimony of **Jean Desravines, CEO, New Leaders**

Prepared for **U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies**

Regarding **U.S. Department of Education
School Leader Recruitment and Support Program—\$14.5 million**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the FY2019 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

New Leaders is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring high academic achievement for all children, especially students in poverty and students of color, by developing transformational school leaders and advancing the policies and practices that allow great leaders to succeed. Since 2000, we have trained 3,200 outstanding school leaders who annually reach approximately 500,000 students in partnership with more than 30 districts and 150 charter schools. Moreover, our leaders overwhelmingly work on behalf of historically underserved students: 78 percent of students served are low-income and 87 percent are children of color. In addition, our programs are evidence-based. An independent study by the RAND Corporation found that students who attend New Leader schools outperform their peers by statistically significant margins *specifically* because of the strong leadership of their New Leader principal.ⁱ And a recent review of school leadership interventions cited New Leaders as the principal preparation program with the strongest evidence of positive impact on student achievement.ⁱⁱ

New Leaders is committed to getting a well-prepared, well-supported principal in every school so that our nation’s teachers and students can thrive. 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. More than a decade of research shows that well-prepared, well-supported principals have a huge influence on teacher practice and student success. School leaders account for 25 percent of a school’s impact on student learning,ⁱⁱⁱ and an above-average principal can improve student achievement by 20 percentage points.^{iv} Moreover, outstanding school leaders attract and retain great educators: fully 97 percent of teachers list principal quality as critical to their retention and career decisions—*more than any other factor*.^v And school leaders transform the lowest-performing schools, where the positive effects of strong leadership on student achievement are most pronounced.^{vi} In fact, a landmark study found “virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader.”^{vii}

We were pleased that the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) maintained and strengthened the **School Leader Recruitment and Support Program (SLRSP)**. However, we were deeply dismayed to see funding for SLRSP zeroed out in the FY 2018 spending deal.

The School Leader Recruitment and Support Program (SLRSP) was authorized under ESSA with bipartisan support and is the only federal program with an exclusive focus on evidence-based school leadership interventions for high-need schools. SLRSP updates the School Leadership Program (SLP, the program included in the previous version of the Elementary and Secondary

Education Act (ESEA)) and provides districts with resources to develop and support dynamic leaders who have a measurable, positive impact on student achievement. The program empowers eligible entities—including state or local educational agencies—to pursue a range of activities in support of school leadership for high-need schools, such as the development and implementation of leadership training programs, the provision of ongoing professional development for school leaders, and the dissemination of best practices regarding the recruitment and retention of highly effective school leaders. In addition, eligible entities may carry out projects in partnership with nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education. Finally, under priorities set forth in the reauthorized statute, SLRSP incentivizes eligible entities to focus on principal preparation and professional development practices for which there is evidence of effectiveness, as demonstrated through rigorous research.

As implementation of ESSA moves to the state, local, and school levels, it is more important than ever that we ensure every school is led by an outstanding principal—a focus that can lead to incredible results for kids while representing a cost-effective use of federal resources. According to a national analysis, the average cost to recruit, prepare, and hire a new principal is \$75,000.^{viii} Because 12 percent of principals leave the profession every year, replacing each requires significant resources—upwards of \$200 million for the nation’s high-need schools. That same analysis found that the average cost of principal support is \$16,500—requiring more than \$350 million annually to mentor and support the leaders of high-need schools. Though the need is great, investments in leadership are extremely cost-effective: supporting one principal is actually an investment in the 25 teachers and 500 or more students he or she, on average, supports. In fact, a National Governors Association report describes how slightly shifting the balance of educator investments toward principals is a smart way to improve school working conditions to foster stronger teaching and better outcomes for kids.^{ix} Further, strategies to address principal burnout, which disproportionately affects high-need schools,^x can yield huge cost savings.^{xi}

The federal government has a crucial role to play in advancing innovation and sharing best practices with the field so that state and local leadership strategies, especially for high-need schools, can be strengthened, now and in the future, by a strong and growing evidence base. The SLP helped launch and expand some of the country’s most innovative and effective leadership development programs, including New Leaders, New Teacher Center, NYC Leadership Academy, and TNTP. Since receiving SLP grants, these organizations have grown exponentially to reach many more schools, teachers, and students in high-need communities—greatly expanding the impact of the federal government’s initial investment. Further, SLP grantees, including those affiliated with the University Council of Educational Administrators (UCEA), have demonstrated a remarkable commitment to programmatic evaluation, continuous improvement, and transparency. By proactively sharing their lessons and resources open-source with the field, these organizations have helped to galvanize dramatic changes to the principal preparation sector as a whole^{xii}—inspiring necessary changes to the way principals are trained to lead our nation’s schools in states and districts across the country.

It is worth noting that while there are other programs that *can* support effective school leadership programs and strategies, the reality is that leadership has historically been overlooked and consistently underfunded,^{xiii} so it is absolutely crucial that we reinstate this dedicated funding source. Without SLRSP, we lose a key federal lever for seeding the next generation of effective

principal development programs, promoting equity, advancing ongoing innovation, and sharing cutting-edge school leadership lessons with the broader field.

We urge Congress to restore funding for SLRSP at \$14.5 million to seed innovative, evidence-based school leadership programs and partnerships that promise a return for students, schools, and communities that far exceeds this targeted investment.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the views of New Leaders on the FY2019 appropriations. If you would like to discuss our recommendations, please do not hesitate to contact policyteam@newleaders.org.

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- ⁱ Gates, S., Hamilton, L., Martorell, P., et. al. (2014). *Preparing Principals to Raise Student Achievement: Implementation and Effects of the New Leaders Program in Ten Districts*. The RAND Corporation. Retrieved from http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR507.html.
- ⁱⁱ Herman, R., Gates, S. M., Chavez-Herrerias, E. R., and Harris, M. (2016). *School Leadership Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (Volume I)*. The RAND Corporation. Retrieved from http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1500/RR1550/RAND_RR1550.pdf.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning: A review of research for the Learning from Leadership Project*. New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Pages/How-Leadership-Influences-Student-Learning.aspx>.
- ^{iv} Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- ^v 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.
- ^{vi} Seashore Louis, K., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K., & Anderson, S. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning*. Washington, DC: Wallace Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Pages/Investigating-the-Links-to-Improved-Student-Learning.aspx>.
- ^{vii} Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004).
- ^{viii} School Leaders Network. (2014). Churn: The High Cost of Principal Turnover. Retrieved from http://connectleadsucceed.org/sites/default/files/principal_turnover_cost.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,-15,792.
- ^{ix} National Governors Association. (2015). *Improving Educational Outcomes: How State Policy Can Support School Principals as Instructional Leaders*. Washington, DC: National Governors Association. Retrieved from <https://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/2015/1506SupportingPrincipals.pdf>.
- ^x According to 2014 data from the National Center for Education Statistics, high-need schools must also grapple with an overall principal turnover rate of 28 percent, significantly higher than schools in more affluent communities.
- ^{xi} According to School Leaders Network (2014), up to \$330K annually for a typical urban district.
- ^{xii} University Council for Educational Administration and New Leaders. (2016). State Evaluation of Principal Preparation Programs Toolkit. Retrieved from www.sepkit.org.
- ^{xiii} For the past several years, more than two-thirds of districts have invested zero federal professional development funds on school leaders. Sources: U.S. Department of Education (2015). *Findings from the 2014-15 Survey on the Use of Funds Under Title II, Part A*. U.S. Department of Education (2014). *Findings from the 2013-14 Survey on the Use of Funds Under Title II, Part A*. U.S. Department of Education (2013). *Findings from the 2012-13 Survey on the Use of Funds Under Title II, Part A*. All retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/resources.html>.