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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENT: SELECTION, SUPPORT & EVALUATION

Key Strategies From NewSchools' Portfolio Ventures

June 2008

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METHODOLOGY

This case study was prepared by NewSchools Venture Fund to document “promising practices” in use by our portfolio ventures in a format that could be shared with others in the portfolio. To complete this tool, NewSchools conducted background research on Green Dot Public Schools, New Leaders for New Schools, and Achievement First, and interviewed management teams at each of these organizations. Additionally, practices from Aspire Public Schools were included. As a result, NewSchools compiled a variety of practices and approaches that nonprofit charter management organizations (CMOs) have put in place to select and develop their principals.

About the Organizations

Green Dot Public Schools is a nonprofit charter management and development organization founded in 1999 to improve the schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The first Green Dot high school, Animo Inglewood, opened in the fall of 2002 and has since been joined by 11 other high schools in Los Angeles that provide a college-preparatory curriculum to students in a small, personalized environment.

Achievement First (AF) is a nonprofit charter school management organization founded in July 2003 with the mission to “deliver on the often-denied promise of equal educational opportunity for America’s urban children by inspiring in them the belief that they can achieve and by developing in them the academic and character skills necessary to compete on a level playing field.” Building on the exceptional success of Amistad Academy in New Haven, CT, Achievement First now operates twelve schools (elementary, middle and high school) in Connecticut and New York City.

New Leaders for New Schools was founded in 2000 with the mission to “ensure high academic achievement for every student by attracting and preparing outstanding leaders and supporting the performance of the urban public schools they lead, at scale.” New Leaders recruits talented and committed individuals through a rigorous selection process. These principal candidates receive extensive training and are placed in a yearlong, full-time residency with a talented mentor principal. After this residency year, principals and their schools also receive ongoing support, tools and resources from New Leaders and become part of a community of other New Leaders fellows. New Leaders for New Schools works with districts across the country, including Baltimore, California’s Bay Area, Chicago, Memphis, Milwaukee, New Orleans, New York City, Prince George’s County and Washington, D.C.

Aspire Public Schools (Aspire) establishes and operates public charter schools in California focused on providing low-income, urban youth with a high-quality education that will prepare them for college. Founded in 1998 to “enrich students’ lives and to reshape the public school system,” Aspire opened its first two charter schools in 1999 in California’s Central Valley and currently operates 21 schools in six counties throughout California, serving nearly 6,000 students in grades K-12.

About NewSchools Venture Fund

NewSchools Venture Fund is a national nonprofit venture philanthropy firm that seeks to transform public education – particularly for underserved students – by supporting education entrepreneurs and connecting their work to systems change. In order to maximize the impact of its ventures, NewSchools also connects the work of these entrepreneurs with one another and with the broader field through events and publications. By leveraging this collective knowledge, NewSchools’ ultimate goal is to empower these entrepreneurs to transform public education so that *all* children have the opportunity to attend a high-quality public school.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As you think about how the practices described here apply to your own organization, please consider the questions below.

1. What are your organization's assumptions about which skills are "coachable" and which skills a principal candidate must already possess upon entry?
2. What are the 3-5 requisite core competencies for a principal to be successful at a school in your organization?
3. Does your principal selection process map to your organization's core values and mission? Does it successfully screen for these qualities? How do you know?
4. Are structured scaffolds in place to ensure new principals are supported as they open a school and lead for the first year?
5. Are coaching sessions frequent, structured and focused? How does your organization match coaches with principals?
6. What types of targeted training do principals receive? Are training topics differentiated by principal experience and need?
7. Are principal performance metrics explicit, clear and based on measurable and observable metrics rather than on subjective criteria?
8. Are principals' learning needs attended to for all levels of development (e.g. pre-service to veteran)?
9. What does your organization do really well in the principal selection and development process? Where are the gaps? What areas need improvement?

INTRODUCTION

The school principal has a significant impact on student achievement. Research shows that the knowledge, skills, and disposition that a principal brings to the leadership of a school affect nearly all facets of the learning environment. School culture, teacher quality and retention, staff professional development, student behavior, and parent satisfaction are all influenced by the principal. Moreover, the role of principal is both demanding and challenging, which results in a low principal retention rate across both traditional district schools and charter schools. Some experts have gone so far as to declare a “crisis in school leadership,” calling for an overhaul of the current credentialing system (Usdan, 2000). Given these realities, principal selection, development and evaluation has been the subject of much attention and research in recent years. With this new knowledge base, school systems are increasingly devoting more time and resources to uncovering best practices and implementing principal development programs that are reflective of their core values and performance standards.

In this tool, we explore the practices of three organizations – charter management organizations (CMOs) Achievement First (AF) and Green Dot Public Schools, and national nonprofit New Leaders for New Schools – identified as leaders in principal development. While each organization has constructed a distinctively different approach, they are united in their commitments to selecting principal candidates who whole-heartedly embrace their organizations’ core values. In addition, they perceive principals’ learning needs as a continuum from pre-service to veteran. These organizations have made strides in selecting leaders that represent a tighter “fit” with their cultural norms and have put in place scaffolds to help their new principals succeed. However, it is important to note that all three organizations still struggle with the challenges of developing strong leaders and continue to seek out ways to improve their systems. As such, they have developed dynamic approaches that are responsive to the changing needs of their organizations, learning environments and student populations. In addition, practices from Aspire Public Schools have also been included given their deep experience and innovative strategies in principal selection and development.

This tool is organized into three key activities related to principal development: 1) selecting leaders, 2) training leaders, and 3) evaluating leaders, and aims to identify the best practices and protocols within each activity. In order to maximize this tool’s practical applications and to make it user-friendly, we have distilled practices, pulled out snapshots of protocols, and highlighted key lessons. In many cases, we have included in the appendix full versions of documents that are excerpted in the text.

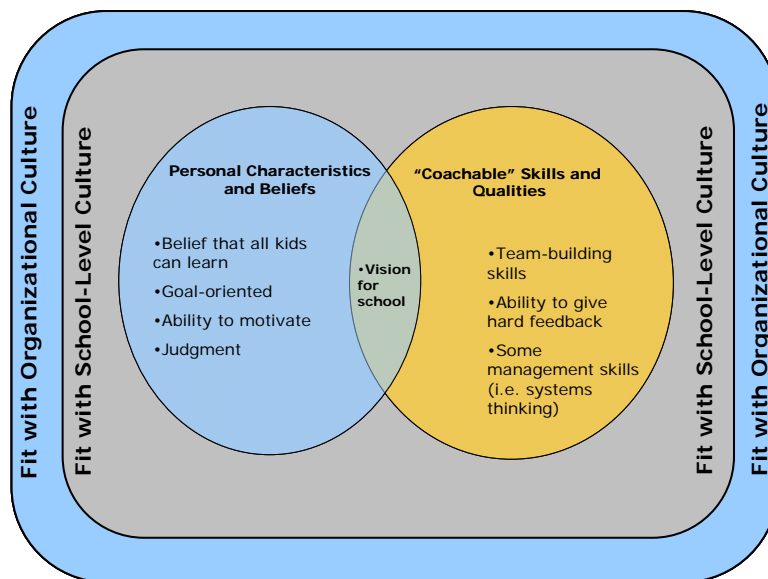
KEY ACTIVITIES

1. *Selecting Leaders*

Selecting the right people to develop for leadership roles is a process worthy of investing time and money up front, to ensure candidates are a good fit for the principal role. It is important for an organization to begin with a clear understanding of the requisite skill set and talents necessary for a principal to be successful.

Achievement First, Green Dot and New Leaders for New Schools all stressed the critical importance of early talent identification. New Leaders assesses and selects individuals who excel on a set of selection criteria (based on research and the competencies of successful school leaders) which are used to assess candidates in four areas: Beliefs and Orientation, Teaching and Learning, Strategic Management, and Personal Qualities¹. According to New Leaders, after developing the set of skills needed to succeed as a principal, organizations should then delineate between skills they believe are “coachable” (e.g. team-building skills, management) and can be taught, and those deemed difficult to teach (e.g. deeply held personal beliefs and dispositions). While an organization should guard against hiring candidates who lack the critical skills that are deemed difficult to teach, it may choose to hire a principal candidate without the requisite “coachable skills,” because a promising candidate could learn these skills once joining the organization. Since organizations will have different beliefs as to which skills fall within each of these two categories, they should create distinct development programs that reflect their core beliefs. Below is a sample framework to help your organization identify which skills and qualities your organization has identified as important to be a successful principal and categorize these skills and characteristics as “coachable” or difficult to teach (a blank template of this map can be found in the Appendix).

Sample of layered criteria for selecting principals



Another layer of characteristics to discuss as an organization is “cultural fit,” an overlapping and less tangible set of traits that describe the candidates’ overall match with the school and organization given the existing organizational norms (the conceptual framework above shows how these qualities and skills relate). In fact, cultural fit is so important that Green Dot, Achievement First, and other CMOs in the NewSchools portfolio often prefer developing their own pipeline of principals from within their schools. These organizations identify teachers who demonstrate promising leadership talent and who have already embraced the

¹ Note that NLNS launched an ongoing learning and fieldwork plan, informed by analyses of high-gaining schools compared to schools making only incremental gains, in order to identify and differentiate what school-level practices and leadership actions have the most impact at different stages along a school’s trajectory of improvement. The organization is now working to revise and refine its principal selection, training and evaluation processes.

organization's cultural norms and core beliefs, and then recruit them into leadership positions. Reportedly, retention rates are higher for internal promotions than for principals brought in from outside these organizations. In fact, school districts are also starting to use this approach: New York Superintendent Irma Zardoya noted, "We have to grow our own leaders ... so that we have a constant, ready supply of leaders, which means that we have created a continuum (Darling-Hammond, 2005). We keep adding steps to it every year, to get people from the classroom right up to the superintendent."

EXHIBIT 1

Principal Performance Criteria Rubric for "Aspire Values"

Below is a truncated version of Aspire's principal performance rubric for one of their five identified performance competencies, "Aspire Values." Please see the appendix for the full rubric.

	Unsatisfactory	Proficient	Distinguished
Is collaborative	Does not work well with own staff, other principals, and/or Home Office staff	Consistently goes beyond mere coordination to work own staff, other principals, and Home Office in ways that add value	Consistently finds new ways to encourage collaboration within school and across the organization
Displays a sense of ownership	Does not hold self or others accountable for behavior or results; makes excuses; resists looking at or discussing goals and metrics.	Consistently holds self and others accountable for school results. Creates and follows-up with timely action plans in response to results measured by Home Office.	Consistently holds self and others accountable for school results. Creates and follows-up with timely, robust and flexible action plans in response to results measured by Home Office. Creates additional interim measures to ensure action plans are effective, and modifies activities accordingly.
Holds self to high quality standards	Has low expectations and standards for self and others' work. Does not seem to understand Aspire performance standards.	Understands and embraces Aspire standards and expectations for own and team performance. Work is consistently high quality.	Understands and embraces Aspire standards and expectations for own and team performance. Continuously improves. Work consistently exceeds expectations.
Is customer-service oriented	Does not respond to parent and student requests in a timely manner.	Consistently responds to parents, student and staff requests in a timely manner and in a way that reflects an understanding of the needs of customers.	Consistently responds to parents, student and staff requests in a timely and appropriate manner. Deeply understands needs of customers. Finds ways to increase customer satisfaction at the school.
Is purposeful	Does not understand Aspire or school vision and mission; works at cross-purposes or lacks direction.	Understands, embraces, and consistently acts in ways that are aligned with Aspire vision and mission, not just school needs.	Deeply understands, embraces, and consistently acts in ways that are aligned with Aspire vision and mission. Seeks and finds ways to

Mapping Your Selection Process

Below are three key steps for developing a principal selection process, drawn from the practices of the organizations profiled.

1. **Establish clear selection criteria.** Criteria that are aligned with organizational culture and mission are essential for developing an evidence-based selection process. The criteria should be both detailed enough to describe a clear vision of proficiency and broad enough to span the full range of instructional, interpersonal, cultural, organizational, and community-building competencies needed to be a successful principal (see Exhibit 1 for an excerpt from Aspire Public Schools' rubric).
2. **Identify “non-negotiable” traits.** New Leaders points out that there are certain critical traits and skills that an entering principal candidate must know and be able to do and therefore are the most important to screen for. As an example, New Leaders believes that every prospective principal must demonstrate:
 - **A fundamental belief that all students can learn:** A passion and relentless drive to ensure high academic achievement for every child regardless of background.
 - **Strong knowledge of teaching and learning:** An ability to distinguish outstanding teaching and provide guidance to improve instruction.
 - **An unyielding focus on goals and results:** A goal-oriented disposition and holds self personally responsible for setting and achieving goals.
3. **Develop a multi-modal selection process aligned to your organization's values.** Research shows that many schools successfully develop mission-aligned criteria, but fall short when developing an interview process that successfully screens candidates against these criteria. Examples of effective interview questions and tactics include:
 - At Achievement First, interviews begin with the question: “What makes a good leader?” Listening to candidates explain their vision of good leadership helps clarify whether there is cultural alignment.
 - At Aspire, questions are aligned with core values. For example, to screen for the Aspire value of “collaboration,” candidates are asked to respond to the following scenario: “An amazing teacher candidate has applied to every Aspire school in the region. You really need a teacher with his/her skills and background, but are behind schedule on interviewing. Another principal has already interviewed him/her and is ready to make an offer. What do you do?”
 - At Achievement First, candidates are taken through particular scenarios that they may face as a principal. What is most important to AF is not the specific plan of action the candidate develops but whether the candidate can think through the systemic effects of his or her decision. Can he or she anticipate the consequences of the proposed plan of action?
 - Another critical question is to ask candidates to talk about a project they have managed (e.g. tutoring program, curriculum mapping process). Evidence of an ability to lead people and manage projects is a strong indicator of future success.

In addition to traditional interviews, a variety of activities should be designed to better understand the candidates' range of skills and responses to challenging situations. The list below is a sample of screening activities gathered from organizations in this study. Candidates were asked to do the following as part of the selection process:

- Teach a class
- Observe a class or video lesson and give feedback (written and/or oral)
- Participate in a parent or community event, or field questions from a parent town hall meeting
- Analyze student data and develop a four-week plan (see Exhibit 2 below)
- Participate in a teacher-led data discussion
- Respond to difficult case study scenarios

EXHIBIT 2

Aspire Data Analysis Assignment

The document below is a take-home assignment for Aspire's principal candidates.

DATA ANALYSIS ASSIGNMENT FOR PRINCIPAL CANDIDATES

This assignment is designed to evaluate a candidate's ability to provide instructional leadership using student performance data.

Set-up

- Candidates are provided with:
 - Database of school performance data (by student, prior year CST and % correct on all benchmarks)
 - Edusoft reports for all benchmarks by strand
- For internal candidates, data provided is for another school. For external candidates, data provided may be for actual school.

Directions for Candidate

- Attached are the following pieces of data:
 - Spreadsheet of student performance data – by student, prior year CST and % correct on all benchmarks. (Note: benchmark exams are Aspire-created, standards-aligned tests that are given in the fall, winter and 6 weeks prior to CST testing. Each benchmark tests all the standards for that grade level, but each test is different from the others.)
 - Reports for all Spring ELA benchmarks, by student, by strand
- Using the data provided, develop a plan for the last 4 weeks prior to testing. Assume you are the principal with the autonomy to make all the decisions normally related to that position in an Aspire charter school.
- In addition to the core classroom teachers, assume that the school has the following people to deploy: 2 instructional coaches (10 hours per week per coach), 2 instructional assistants, and 2 after school tutors. You may be as creative as you wish.
- Your final plan may be in any form (Word, Excel, PowerPoint).
- Your plan is due in one week. Please do not feel obligated to spend more than 3 hours on this assignment!

2. Training Leaders

The Pre-Service Training Year

Practical, pre-service leadership experience – whether in the form of an internship or a residency – is critical to the success of principal training programs. For many organizations, especially those that prefer to develop candidates internally, promoting promising teachers to administrative roles provides the most economical solution to costly internship training programs. Ideally, candidates spend a few years honing their management skills in administrative support roles such as academic dean or assistant principal until they are ready to lead as principal. In addition to having ample time to hone management skills, this approach has two other benefits. First, while working in administrative support roles, promising candidates have the opportunity to learn from the school’s current principal. Second, advancing a promising teacher from classroom teaching to administrative support roles and then to the role of principal creates an attractive career path for talented individuals who desire school leadership roles.

Ideally, this on-the-job training should be supplemented by coursework or skill training that is tightly interwoven with and aligned with practice (Darling-Hammond, 2007). This finding is consistent with research that suggests adults learn best when exposed to situations requiring the application of acquired skills, knowledge, and problem-solving strategies within authentic settings. However, in reality, practical on-the-job training often supplants coursework, in part because university programs are often poorly aligned with practice. In order to address this challenge, Green Dot and Aspire are joining forces with other CMOs in the Los Angeles area to bolster their own principal training programs with an external partner that can provide job-embedded coursework and skill training.

Nationally, about 25% of principal preparation programs offer full-time, paid internships that combine coursework, shadowing, and training with small scale administrative projects or duties. These programs, including New Leaders for New Schools, stress authentic learning with opportunities to directly transfer knowledge of best practices to actual school initiatives. New Leaders’ candidates spend a “resident year” in a school in the district where they will be placed. During the year, each Resident works with a mentor principal as a member of the school’s leadership team to hone his/her leadership skills and advance the goals of the residency school, with a responsibility for improving student achievement and teacher practice. Residents are supported by a leadership coach and take supplemental coursework throughout the year. Residents also participate in weekly city meetings for ongoing peer support and coaching, with opportunities for learning, reflection, group problem-solving, and training on deeper district context around educational issues. In order to fulfill the requirements of the New Leaders for New Schools Program and receive administrative certification, each Resident must demonstrate proficiency by the end of the year in each of the competencies outlined below (see Exhibit 3).

EXHIBIT 3**New Leaders for New Schools Resident Core Competencies**

The following table summarizes the core competencies that New Leaders for New Schools expects its Residents to master during the residency year. Please note these competencies were in use during the 2007-2008 school year. New Leaders is now revising its competencies based on its research, data and achievement analyses, and fieldwork in high-gaining schools.

School Leadership	Personal Leadership	Technical Leadership
<p>Ensure Effective Teaching and Learning</p> <p>Focus on Data & Outcomes</p> <p>Nurture Student & Staff Efficacy</p> <p>Lead Learning Organizations</p> <p>Build School Community & Culture</p> <p>Manage Effectively</p>	<p>Model the Way – <i>clearly articulate personal values and non-negotiable; align actions with shared values</i></p> <p>Inspire a Shared Vision – <i>enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations</i></p> <p>Challenge the Process – <i>seek innovative ways to change, grow, and learn from mistakes</i></p> <p>Enable Others to Act – <i>strengthen others by building their capacity and creating a climate of trust and positive interdependence</i></p> <p>Encourage the Heart – <i>recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence</i></p>	<p>Budget – <i>develop and manipulate school budget to maximize resources for student learning</i></p> <p>Union Contract – <i>understand union contracts to make effective decisions in service of student learning</i></p> <p>School Law – <i>implement necessary school policies and procedures in accordance with local, state, and federal school law</i></p> <p>Scheduling – <i>implement effective school schedule and procedures</i></p> <p>Human Resources Policies and Procedures – <i>implement effective human resources policies and procedures to ensure that all staff members are managed effectively</i></p> <p>Facilities – <i>use school facilities to enhance student learning and school culture</i></p> <p>Technology – <i>use technology effectively to support student learning, school management, and school culture</i></p>

Summer Training

All three organizations take advantage of summer vacation time to provide additional training. Achievement First allocates one week of their three-week summertime professional development to administrative training. Training sessions titled, “School Culture Conversations” or “School Culture and Character,” speak to the importance of the principal’s role in upholding and reinforcing the schools’ culture. Other sessions focus on instructional leadership with training on observing and evaluating staff.

While organizations often use the summer months for discrete skill training, it is also a busy time for principals to prepare the school for students. For all principals, summer months are spent on the myriad

operational, instructional, and management tasks necessary to open the school. Principals oversee a range of preparation tasks including: developing the school calendar, determining teacher loads, planning professional development, and drafting teacher professional growth plans. Exhibit 4 below provides what may appear to be a simple list of administrative tasks, but such a tool is an enormously helpful scaffold for new principals opening schools for the first time, who are in need of a reference with a clear delineation of who owns which responsibilities.

EXHIBIT 4

Excerpted from Achievement First's Administrative Calendar Task List: July

The following excerpt highlights some tactical information that may be helpful to first-time principals.

Administrative Tasks – July	Responsible Party
All teacher information in the student information system (demographics, courses, classes)	Registrar
All student information in the student information system (demographics, courses, classes)	Registrar
Auto-caller, emailer set-up for all parents in the student information system	Registrar
All standardized tests for the year in locked bins/files	School Ops
Finalize school site daily calendars	Principal
Finalize busing lists and routes	School Ops
Facilities preparation (cleaning, painting, electrifying, AC, telephony/IT, build-out)	School Ops
Family Chats - finish	Principal, Dean of Students
Set-up classroom and offices (receive and sort/distribute MOL orders)	School Ops
Establish yearly elementary data spreadsheets (Saxon, DI) on server	AF Ops
All computers ready for new staff, returning staff getting new computers	IT Team
New sites fully outfitted with all IT functions	IT Team
Establish Student Performance (Class of 20XX) spreadsheets on server for new cohorts	AF Ops
Set-up folders/files for year in school spec. info: daily schedule, parent handbook, pd plans, weekly memo, parent update	AF Ops
Daily schedule, parent handbook, PD plans for year/trimester in these folders	School Ops
ES Student testing: Grade and record scores on spreadsheets - for NEW students	Registrar
MS Student testing: Grade and record scores on spreadsheets - for NEW students	Registrar
Letter to all staff about the start of training, etc. (by mid-July)	Registrar (drafted by principal)
Letters to all returning students, parents (by mid-July)	Registrar (drafted by principal)
Letters to all new students, parents (by mid-July)	Registrar (drafted by principal)

On-the-Job Learning Supports

Once the school year starts, the demands on principals' time make it challenging to continue professional development. However, the need is critical, especially for new principals. Embedded learning supports are an important component of the development continuum extending from pre-service through induction and are essential to any principal development program. On-the-job learning supports generally fall into three categories:

- A. Coaching/Mentoring:** on-the-ground, individualized support;
- B. Cohorts:** collaborative learning through peer groups; and
- C. Targeted training:** professional development focused on skills and content.

While these learning supports take different forms across different organizations, together they provide a comprehensive approach to supporting new principals and often veteran principals as well.

A. Coaching/Mentoring

New principals cite individualized coaching as the most valuable form of on-the-job support. All three organizations profiled in this tool strive to provide mentoring or coaching that supports modeling, questioning, observations of practice and feedback, and is tailored to the individual leadership needs of the novice principals. Coaching sessions can take on a range of formats depending on the developmental needs of a principal. For example, a coach and principal might review and analyze student achievement data and develop strategic plans in response to the data, or a coach might observe a principal's conversation with a teacher and then provide follow-up feedback.

While coaching can vary from unstructured (impromptu discussions) to highly structured (protocol-driven data meetings), all three organizations protect time on the calendar for formal coaching sessions. These sessions are designed to be: **frequent**, occurring at a minimum of once every month, but more often twice monthly; **structured**, with agendas and clear expectations of both role and outcome; and **focused**, tightly concentrated on a specific topic, such as supervision of instruction. For example, Green Dot's Key Results Protocol, shown below in Exhibit 5, illustrates the structure and focus of these formalized coaching sessions.

It is important to highlight the distinction between principal development and school improvement. Achievement First finds that there are always two issues involved in principal support: 1) how is the school doing? and 2) how is the principal doing? The first question, which elicits problem-solving on school performance issues, often receives the most attention in principal/supervisor dialogue. The second question, which elicits discussion on principal growth and development, too often takes a back seat to school issues. As AF's superintendent notes, "The reality is that we spend most of the time on school-based issues. The challenge is finding time to look through the other lens, of ongoing professional development and growth (for individual principals)."

New Leaders also stresses the importance of driving continuous learning and development of the New Leader, while also deeply supporting the tailored and focused school improvement efforts needed to drive dramatic achievement gains. A New Leaders coach works with each first-year principal to support the continued growth of the principal around political/interpersonal/operational issues, change management, and principal trajectory needs. Growth plans are used to structure feedback, determine future professional development opportunities, and assist in performance evaluation. These plans also help to foster a culture of personal reflection, encouraging new principals to continually assess their own performance. Coaches also work with principals to lead others in diagnosing school needs and develop and monitor an action plan.

EXHIBIT 5**Green Dot's Key Results Meeting Protocol**

The following protocol provides an example of an agenda for a structured coaching session for new principals.

Description:

Once a month, each principal will meet with the Chief Academic Officer (CAO) or Mentor/Lead Principal to reflect on their role as an instructional leader. The meetings are meant to provide principals with feedback on their supervision of instruction and to help the CAO and Mentor/Lead Principal individualize the support provided to each principal.

Agenda for Key Results Meeting:

- Reflection on the month's staff development
 - What went well? How do you know?
 - What did not go well? How do you know? How would you change it for next time?
 - How did you determine the focus of staff development for this month?
- Plan next month's staff development
 - What is the focus of your staff development for next month?
 - How does your staff development for next month connect to the needs you have noticed while in classrooms?
 - What resources do you need for your staff development next month?
 - Who will help you facilitate the staff development?
- Reflection and discussion of coaching, evaluation, and the supervision of instruction
 - How often have you been in classrooms this month?
 - What are you doing to recognize and highlight the best practices of your best teachers?
 - How are you using your best teachers to teach their colleagues?
 - What are you doing to support your struggling teachers?
- Feedback on written documentation
 - What documentation do you have that contains the feedback you have provided to teachers during your observations?
 - What documentation do you have that is evidence of the support you have provided to your struggling teachers?
- Set goals for supervision and instruction for the next month

Artifacts to Bring to the Meeting:

- Staff development agendas
- Evidence of supervision and evaluation including:
 - Teacher conference summaries
 - Documentation of observations: informal and formal memos
 - APAP goals
 - Teacher buddy observations
 - Mentor teacher observations
 - Any other documentation regarding supervision and evaluation of employees: action plans, development plans, etc.

Achievement First practices an intensive form of individualized coaching they call "Co-observation Days." Each Academic Dean and Principal participate in four "co-observation" days each year, in which a supervising mentor spends the entire day observing the learning environment of the school together with the principal. Following a structured format, the mentor shadows the principal for the day, and accompanies him or her in several classroom observations and school walkthroughs. They watch transition times, lunches and dismissals, and consider together the core issues that the school needs to address. In addition to conversations throughout the day, they allocate time to debrief at the end of the day, talking through leadership issues and challenges. By calibrating their observations, they develop common understandings of quality and also identify emerging challenges (see Exhibit 6 for more information).

EXHIBIT 6**Achievement First Co-Observation Day**

This is excerpted from the schedule for Achievement First's Co-Observation Days and demonstrates the organization's focus on instructional leadership. See the Appendix for full schedule.

- Morning Walk-around - 40 minutes scheduled for school walk-around & conversation
- Afternoon Walk-around – 40 minutes scheduled for walk-around & conversation
- Observing your class -- observation of principal-taught class
- Debriefing your class – 20 minutes scheduled
- Observation #1 – full class observation
- Debrief of Observation #1 – 30 minutes scheduled with the teacher
- Observation #2 – full class observation
- Debrief of Observation #2 – 30 minutes scheduled with the teacher
- Encore! Walk-around – 20 minutes scheduled for walk-around & conversation
- Final thoughts – 45 minutes scheduled for conversation

After the visit:

The mentor will provide written feedback highlighting school strengths and challenges (with suggestions) and, as relevant and appropriate, written feedback to individual teachers.

B. Cohorts

At their best, cohorts of principals promote collaboration, networking, and teamwork. Research suggests that cohorts provide natural opportunities for new principals to share knowledge, reflect on practice, identify challenges and weaknesses and develop new skills and strategies (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Cohorts also help to reduce principal isolation by creating opportunities to problem-solve collaboratively and test ideas in a supportive, non-judgmental setting.

At Achievement First, principals participate in a monthly cohort conference call, facilitated by the superintendent. Each principal shares one great thing that has happened at his or her school, and one challenge that he or she is struggling with. The principals then discuss solutions to one of these challenges together, offering feedback and suggestions. The group also discusses a particular common challenge that has emerged across multiple schools. The superintendent, based on feedback and communication from principals, chooses these topics in advance; past topics have included issues such as math curriculum or character education.

C. Targeted Training

Targeted training opportunities tailored to current challenges to new principals are an important source of support and continued learning. But rather than offering a flavor-of-the-month approach to professional development, thoughtful organizations actually tailor trainings to the emerging needs and skill sets of the new principal cohort. Targeted training strategies can range from full-day, on-site professional development for administrators to off-site conferences on a specific subject to visiting a neighboring school district to observe a particular best practice.

Green Dot has developed an approach to professional development for administrators that is known as the 95/5 model. The model is named for Green Dot's commitment to ensuring that principals spend 95% of their time at their school site and 5% of their time on professional development. Topics for professional development are chosen based on emerging needs and have included: "Re-classification of English-Language students," "Read 180," and "What makes an ideal leader – art vs. science" (see Exhibit 7 for more information). Achievement First points out that in addition to being responsive to individual principal needs,

professional development should also be used strategically to target the kinds of leadership skills the organization believes all school leaders should develop.

EXHIBIT 7

The following outlines Green Dot's approach to professional development for administrators.

Green Dot's 95/5 Model

Rationale:

- To maximize time spent on administrator professional development during the work day
- To maximize the potential for experiential professional development through observations teachers and programs in action at specific school sites
- To provide focused, ongoing professional development for administrators
- To allow for differentiated professional development for administrators

Description:

- Administrators will spend 95% of their time at their school sites, and 5% of their time engaged in professional development sessions.
- A 95/5 training session on a specific topic will be offered once a month for a full day or a partial day.
- Unless otherwise stipulated, each school is expected to send one administrator to each session. The principal and assistant principal should alternate their attendance at the training sessions.
- Administrators' meetings each month will run from 4:30 pm – 6:00 pm.
 - 45 minutes: Discussion of insights gleaned from Key Results that month and next steps as a result of these insights.
 - 45 minutes: Discussion of insights gleaned from 95/5 training that month and next steps as a result of these insights.

3. Evaluating Leaders

The coaching and other learning supports that principals receive should be paired with a meaningful evaluation process so that principals understand the performance standards that are expected of them and can gauge their progress toward meeting these standards. As Green Dot explains, “Everyone here works *hard*; we want them to use the evaluation process to work *smarter*.”

Set performance criteria

The first step in developing a principal evaluation system is to define performance criteria. When developing metrics for principal evaluations, organizations should consider the following:

- **Develop clear and explicit criteria.** Performance criteria should be understandable and clearly stated, and should be based on measurable and observable metrics rather than on subjective measures in order to ensure fairness in the evaluation process. Keep in mind that certain important criteria may be difficult to measure. For example, Achievement First has found that critical skills such as how principals run meetings, interact with staff, and facilitate professional development at the school can be challenging to measure, but important to include nonetheless.
- **Align criteria with your organization's mission.** A strong evaluation process should grow out of the values and mission of the organization. For example, Achievement First's organization-wide focus is on driving academic success, so its principal evaluation process emphasizes student and school achievement.

- **Ensure buy-in from each principal.** It is important that principals understand and are in agreement with the validity of the evaluation process. For this reason, each year at Green Dot, principals have the opportunity to get involved in developing the evaluation criteria and process and in providing feedback on the evaluation. At Achievement First, a principal's agreement with the evaluation criteria is viewed as an indication of his or her alignment with the organization's mission of focusing on academic achievement: if the principal is not bought into accepting full responsibility for the success of the school, they may not be a good fit for the organization overall.

Combine formal and informal evaluations

Once the performance criteria are set, principals should be evaluated regularly throughout the year, both informally and formally.

- **Informal observations provide frequent, detailed feedback.** As principals develop skills as instructional leaders and managers, they should receive regular feedback that assesses their performance in a variety of settings. This practice allows areas for improvement to be identified early on and for progress toward goals to be gauged. In addition, these evaluations can be used to provide more data points for the more formal evaluations, which carry higher stakes. Informal evaluations can take many forms. For example, after each co-observation day at an Achievement First school, the supervisor writes a letter to the principal of the school that summarizes areas of strength and areas for improvement. Green Dot uses school walk-throughs to regularly observe principal performance. After each walk-through and meeting with a principal, the supervisor sends an immediate email that summarizes feedback and next steps. Green Dot has found that the key to these informal evaluations is that the supervisor is frequently present in the schools, so that feedback is constant, specific, and trusted. New Leaders for New Schools integrates informal evaluations with professional development. During the residency year, coaches provide informal feedback to principals during weekly reflective meetings, and map this feedback to the individual development plan for each principal.
- **Formal evaluations carry more rigor – but also higher stakes.** By their very design, formal evaluations are more rigorous and can be high-stakes, informing contract renewal, the next year's salary, and the amount of a performance bonus. All of the organizations profiled here use specific rubrics to guide these evaluations, and all conduct at least two formal observations of each principal each school year. These evaluations often include the perspectives of others beyond the principal's supervisor. For example, as part of the evaluation process, principals at Achievement First and Green Dot complete a parallel self-evaluation, and at Green Dot, school-site staff, students, and parents also evaluate the principal twice a year. Since a consistent set of performance criteria is used for every evaluation, the formal evaluations can also be used to track principal growth over time, as they are at New Leaders. See Exhibit 8 for an excerpt from Green Dot's principal evaluation tool and Exhibit 9 for an excerpt from Achievement First's principal growth plan tool.

EXHIBIT 8**Sample: Green Dot's Principal Evaluation Rubric**

This is an excerpt from Green Dot's principal evaluation rubric. The full evaluation can be found in the Appendix.

Standard 1:

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

Related GD Objectives and Administrator Goals:

- 97% of all 9th grade students are promoted to the 10th grade (students enrolled as of October 1st, 2006; excludes students that are confirmed to have moved out of the attendance area)
- All schools - Minimum 25% proficient and advanced in Algebra for 9th graders except that Animo Inglewood should be 38% Proficient and Advanced
- All returning schools (excluding Jefferson)
 - Minimum 15% proficient & Advanced in Geometry – 10th Grade
 - Minimum 10% Proficient & Advanced in Algebra II – 11th Grade
- All three schools with seniors - 95% of the senior class, as of the first day of the FY 2007 school year, graduate on time (includes summer)
- Animo Leadership and Oscar de la Hoya Animo – 70% of all seniors, as of the first day of the FY 2007 school year, are accepted into 4-year universities
- Animo Inglewood – 80% of all seniors, as of the first day of the FY 2007 school year, are accepted into 4-year universities
- All schools that achieved API scores at or above 700 in FY 2006 will need to achieve an API growth rate of 2.5% plus any unachieved growth target from FY 2006.
- All schools that achieved API scores below 700 in FY 2006 will need to achieve an API growth rate of 3.0% plus any unachieved growth target from FY 2006.
- All new schools will need to achieve API scores of at least 650 API

Indicators:

- Staff analyzes student achievement data once a quarter to draft plans for improvement.

	1	2	3	4	5
Area of Growth					Area of Strength

Reflections on Rating:

Next Steps:

EXHIBIT 9**Sample: Achievement First's Principal Growth Plan**

This is an excerpt from Achievement First's principal growth plan tool. The full tool can be found in the Appendix.

Leadership of People – OUTPUTS**Hiring and Retaining Great Teachers**

Benchmark / Excellent / Good / Fair / Area for Growth

Hires and retains outstanding teachers who share the AF core values and beliefs and are able to deliver on the promise of college for all our students; during the recruitment process, quickly responds to candidate and Team Recruit requests; inspires candidates and motivates them to work at the school (high % of offers accepted); participates actively in Team Recruit activities during the year

Metrics / Observables:

- Teacher survey results
- Observations during visits
- Offer acceptance rates
- Retention rates
- Feedback from Team Recruit

Chief Metrics: Percentage of Teachers Returning for Next Year: _____
Percentage of Job Offers Accepted: _____

Staff Morale & Attendance

Benchmark / Excellent / Good / Fair / Area for Growth

Staff morale, buy-in, and attendance are high

Metrics / Observables

- Teacher survey results
- Observations during visits
- Staff attendance rates
- Observations of staff meetings

Chief Metrics: Staff Attendance Percentage: _____

Instructional Leadership – OUTPUT**Student Achievement**

Benchmark / Excellent / Good / Fair / Area for Growth

Consistently meets/exceeds high standards for student academic achievement and character development; produces “breakthrough” student performance outcomes and ensures we deliver on the promise of college for all our students

Metrics / Observables:

- Student achievement results on state tests
- Student Work Examples
- Student achievement results on standardized tests
- AF School Report Card
- Interim assessment data (including Saxon and DI data)

Chief Metrics: State Test results, DRA, DRP, Terra Nova, Stanford 9, SAT, AP
College acceptance rates, college graduation rates, types of colleges accepted

CONCLUSION

It is critical for growing charter school management organizations (CMOs) to find and develop promising school leaders. In this tool, we have drawn from the experiences of three organizations – Green Dot Public Schools, Achievement First, and New Leaders for New Schools – to identify key strategies for principal selection, development and support, and evaluation. From these key strategies emerge four lessons learned, which are summarized below. Please see this tool’s Appendix for additional helpful supporting information and resources.

- ***Don’t compromise on selection.*** It is better to delay a school opening than to start with a principal who doesn’t have your full confidence that she or he will be successful. Be sure to invest time, effort, and resources to get the selection process right and don’t overlook the importance of cultural fit. Align your screening process with your organization’s core values and expected competencies.
- ***Use a 3-pronged approach to development – coaching, cohorts and training.*** A comprehensive approach to supporting principals – through individualized coaching, group problem-solving and targeted training – provides a scaffolding system that addresses the varied development needs of new principals. Each support fills a specific need for new principals. Be sure to protect time in the calendar and develop protocols to build these supports into the regular work of the school and organization. If left to chance, the everyday urgencies of leading a school will crowd out development needs.
- ***Align, align, align.*** Principal selection, support and evaluation should be aligned with your organization’s core values and mission. Principal competencies should grow out of these values. Resources, time, and support should be aligned to ensure they reflect the core values and mission. Aligning these competencies and skills with the school’s mission is also an important strategy for staying focused and knowing what not to do.
- ***Performance criteria should be clear, explicit and measurable.*** Principals need a clear vision of what success looks like, in a similar way to the clear vision students need for what is expected of them and what high-quality work looks like. Invest in the time to carefully flesh out a rubric describing the entire spectrum from exemplary to unsatisfactory performance.
- ***Provide honest and frequent feedback.*** Coaches, mentors, supervisors, and principals need to be willing to engage in candid, sometimes difficult conversations with one another. These conversations should happen frequently, in both formal and informal settings, so that problems are caught early and so that principal development is maximized.

REFERENCE LIST

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- Usdan, Michael, & McCloud, B., & Podmostko, M. (2000) *Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalship*. Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL).
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APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

I. Selecting Leaders

- **1. Coachable vs. Personal Beliefs/Characteristics: Conceptual Framework**
<http://www.newschools.org/files/Principal-1.ppt>
This blank Venn diagram can be used to facilitate a thought exercise for delineating selection criteria for principal candidates.
- **2. New Leaders for New Schools: Selection Criteria**
<http://www.newschools.org/files/Principal-2.pdf>
This one-page document lists the criteria used to select Principal candidates.
- **3. Aspire Public Schools: Data Analysis Assignment**
<http://www.newschools.org/files/Principal-3.doc>
This data assignment is given to prospective principals so they can evaluate actual student data and develop an action plan.
- **4. Aspire Public Schools: Principal Performance Criteria Rubric**
<http://www.newschools.org/files/Principal-4.doc>
This is a full rubric of competencies deemed necessary to be a successful principal at an Aspire school.
- **5. New Leaders for New Schools: Principal Job Description**
<http://www.newschools.org/files/Principal-5.doc>
This document includes the position description, qualifications, and application procedures for becoming a New Leaders principal candidate.

II. Training Leaders

- **6. New Leaders for New Schools: Resident Core Competencies**
<http://www.newschools.org/files/Principal-6.doc>
This document lists the academic, technical and leadership skills New Leaders residents are expected to master during their training year.
- **7. Achievement First: Administrator Task List**
<http://www.newschools.org/files/Principal-7.xls>
This document delineates the summer training schedule for Achievement First middle school and elementary school staff, including specific tasks and the party responsible for each.
- **8. Green Dot Public Schools: Key Results Planning Guide and Protocol**
<http://www.newschools.org/files/Principal-8.doc>
This one-page document summarizes the “Key Results” meetings that take place once a month at Green Dot school sites. It also offers suggestions for schools to get the most out of the feedback offered at these meetings.
- **9. Achievement First: Principal and Superintendent Co-Observation Day Protocol**
<http://www.newschools.org/files/Principal-9.doc>
This protocol is used to structure co-observation day between principal and superintendent.
- **10. Green Dot Public Schools: 95-5 Model and Schedule**
<http://www.newschools.org/files/Principal-10.doc>
This document contains the rationale for and description of Green Dot’s 95/5 Model for principal coaching and development.

III. Evaluating Leaders

- **11. Green Dot Public Schools: Principal Evaluation Rubric**
<http://www.newschools.org/files/Principal-11.doc>
This evaluation form is organized around six standards of effective leadership. Each standard contains several indicators that help to quantify each standard.
- **12. Achievement First: Principal's Professional Growth Plan**
<http://www.newschools.org/files/Principal-12.doc>
This is a template for a professional growth plan for a principal at Achievement First. The measures of growth are organized into the three dimensions of school leadership at AF: people leadership, school culture leadership and instructional leadership.
- **13. Achievement First: School Report Cards**
<http://www.newschools.org/files/Principal-13.xls>
This dashboard shows the various measures that Achievement First collects at each grade level in each elementary school. This tool is used to focus principal evaluation and support on issues of school achievement.

IV. Other

- **14. New Leaders for New Schools: Resident Leadership Coach Job Description, New Orleans**
<http://www.newschools.org/files/Principal-14.doc>
This three-page document presents the job description for the Resident Leadership Coach position in New Orleans. It describes the New Leaders for New Schools organization and mission, and contains a position description that includes job responsibilities, qualifications, and compensation.