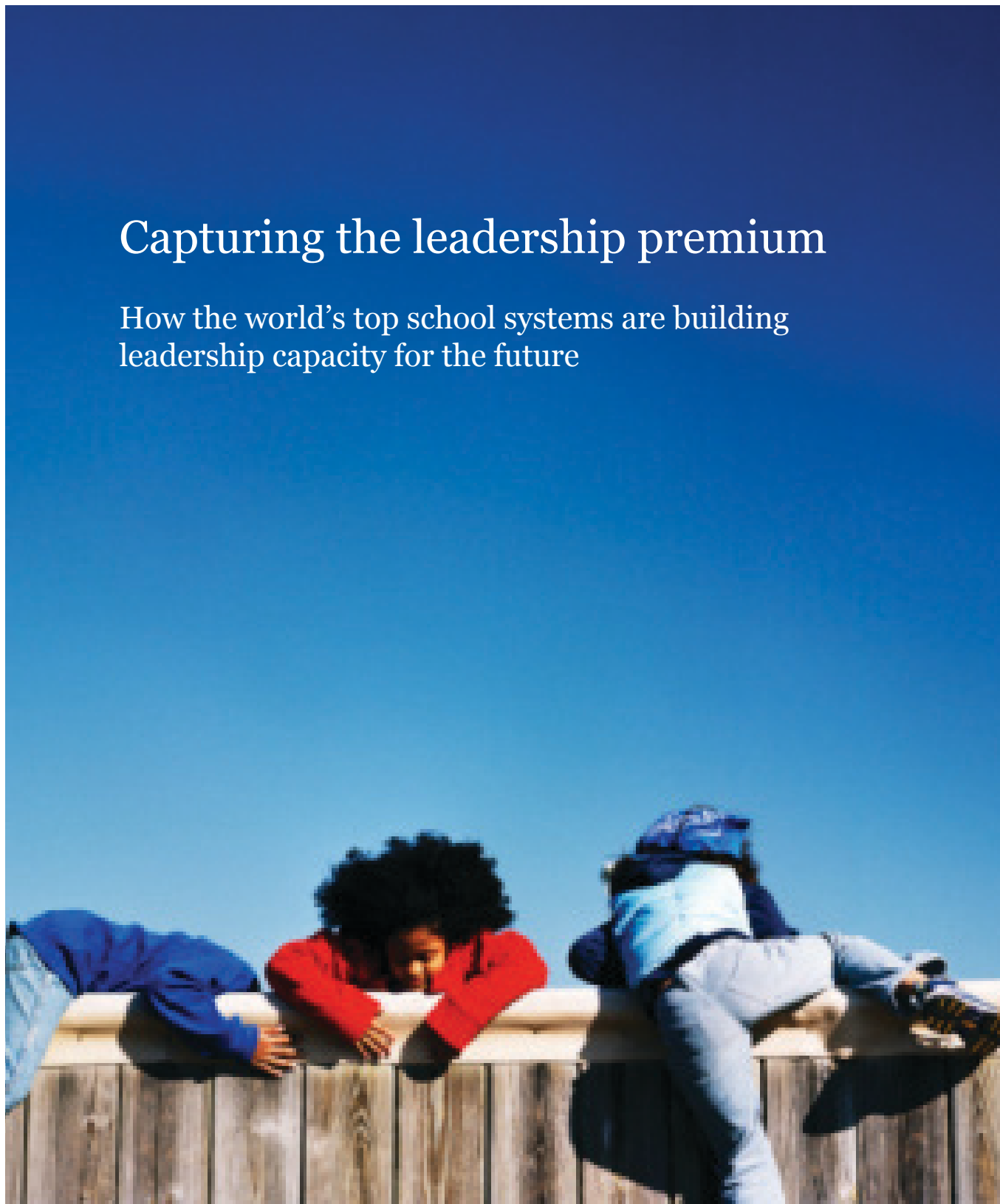


## Education

# Capturing the leadership premium

How the world's top school systems are building leadership capacity for the future



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## Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

This report summarizes findings from the International Review of School Leadership, undertaken by McKinsey & Company in collaboration with the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services during 2010. The views expressed are those of McKinsey alone.

The review represents one of the first attempts to compare school leadership across a range of high-performing education systems.

The work included a literature review, almost 70 interviews with experts, policymakers, and leaders of school systems, and a survey of 1,850 leaders in eight countries. The survey included three groups of leaders: middle-tier leaders (district or local authority), high-performing school leaders, and randomly selected school leaders.

The report summarizes the main findings from the review and describes international evidence and practices relating to:

- The importance of school leadership
- The role of school leaders
- The identification and development of potential leaders
- The selection and placement of school leaders
- The development and opportunities available to serving school leaders
- The role and development of middle-tier leaders

As with all international benchmarking, it is important to recognize that there are contextual differences between systems, and that what works in one system may not work in another. We have therefore tried to avoid direct comparisons, and would stress that the examples here should be taken as sources of insight and ideas, not as proven best practices which can be universally applied. At the same time though, most of the evidence we have reviewed suggests that good leadership is the same irrespective of context, and that "what works" is surprisingly consistent. For instance, the literature review found remarkably similar traits and practices in effective school leaders from Australia to Pakistan to Africa.<sup>1</sup>









This report focuses on the most important insights emerging from the review. As a result, many good practices and programs have been omitted, and in no instance should this report be seen as a comprehensive account of practices in each of the systems.

# Overview of systems selected

The countries and regions selected for review were: Alberta (Canada), England, Ontario (Canada), New York (United States), New Zealand, The Netherlands, Singapore, and Victoria (Australia). The education systems in these countries all perform strongly on international tests, or their performance in this respect is improving, and they demonstrate good practices in school leadership. Collectively they are geographically diverse and structurally mixed (there is a balance of centralized and devolved systems). A snapshot of each system is presented below.

Exhibit 1

## Overview of systems selected

								
	Alberta	England	Netherlands	New York	New Zealand	Ontario	Singapore	Victoria
<b>Population</b> m	3.5	50	16.5	8.4	4.4	13	5.0	5.4
<b>Area</b> (x England)	4.9x	1x	0.3x	0.01x	2.1x	7.0x	0.01x	1.7x
<b>Sub- divisions</b>	62 school boards	150 LAs	12 provinces	5 boroughs/ 12 districts	None	72 school boards	None	9 regional offices
<b>Number of schools<sup>1</sup></b>	2,000	17,200 3,300	7,500 650	1,600	2,600	4,026 897	174 154	2,279
<b>Average school size<sup>1</sup></b>	272	239 973	250 1,350	688	308	350 1,000	1,524 1,298	370
<b>Number of students<sup>1</sup> m</b>	0.6	4.1 3.2	2.6	1.1	0.8	2.1	0.5	0.9
<b>Number of teachers<sup>1</sup></b>	39,535	201,000 209,400	220,000	80,000	38,312	120,000	25,624	40,000

<sup>1</sup> Where two figures are quoted for one item, the first represents primary schools and the second secondary schools  
Source: International Review; Departments of Education

# *The importance of school leadership*

## **“You can't improve schools without leaders”**

Officials in each of the systems we studied agree that school leadership is crucial to outcomes and that it has grown in importance over the past decade. In the words of one Singaporean official: “One of the key revelations over the past ten years is that school leadership is not just an HR issue – it is a strategic issue.” All regard the improvement of leadership capacity as a top priority and an area where more has to be done.

This policy position is based on a growing body of evidence demonstrating the impact of effective school leadership. This evidence is consistent across a large number of countries and contexts, and demonstrates that “school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.”<sup>2</sup> The evidence includes:

- Analysis of Ofsted inspection results in England which suggests that the overall performance of a school almost never exceeds the quality of its leadership and management. For every 100 schools that have good leadership and management, 93 will have good standards of student achievement. For every 100 schools that do not have good leadership and management, only one will have good standards of achievement.
- A large number of quantitative studies in North America which show that school leadership influences performance more than any other variable except socio-economic background and the quality of teaching. A recent study found that “nearly 60 percent of a school's impact on student achievement is attributable to principal and teacher effectiveness. These are the most important in-school factors driving school success, with principals accounting for 25 percent and teachers 33 percent of a school's total impact on achievement.”<sup>3</sup> This statement may even understate the potential impact of effective school leadership, because leadership is itself one of the main drivers of the quality of teaching.
- The OECD's TALIS survey across 23 countries, which found that greater instructional leadership produced a series of positive benefits to schools.

- James Tooley's<sup>4</sup> research on low-cost private schools in India, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and other countries, which shows that, more than school inputs or context, learning depends on a determined and accountable school leader.
- A major study of improving schools in England which found that “there are statistically significant empirical and qualitatively robust associations between heads' educational values, qualities, and their strategic actions and improvement in school conditions leading to improvements in student outcomes.”<sup>5</sup>

More broadly, we know that leadership is critical to the performance of organizations in almost every sector of the economy. While the importance of leadership is sometimes still a subject of debate in education, its significance is now taken for granted in business, politics, the military, and almost every other area of public life.

The importance which the systems ascribe to school leadership also reflects a conviction that leadership is becoming ever more critical to the success of schools. This conviction is based on two trends:

- The international trend is toward the devolution of school management,<sup>6</sup> which makes decisions at school level progressively more important to the success of the system.
- The skills and knowledge which children require in the 21st century are becoming more complex and the range of other issues which schools are expected to help address is growing.<sup>7</sup>

Multiple new leadership initiatives and programs have been set up by the education systems studied for this review. This degree of change and innovation reflects both the importance attributed to school leadership and a sense that, despite growing knowledge about what works, we still do not fully understand how to ensure consistent leadership across systems. In the words of one senior official: “Nobody has cracked this yet – nobody knows how to ensure we develop and select the best.”

# *The roles which school leaders play*

“The job used to be bells, buildings, budget, buses;  
now the pendulum has swung to instructional leadership”

Through evidence accumulated over the past ten years across a range of systems, we already know a lot about what good school leaders do and believe. This knowledge is derived from a wide range of sources, including case studies of effective and ineffective leadership, large-scale analytical studies, data derived from country inspection and assessment systems, and surveys of school leaders and other staff. This knowledge is embodied in research publications, leadership frameworks, and professional development for school leaders.<sup>8</sup>

This research highlights both a set of practices which effective leaders share, and a common set of beliefs, attitudes, and personal attributes which they possess. Of these, there is clear evidence in the literature that developing teachers makes the biggest contribution to student learning outcomes.

## **Practices**

- Building a shared vision and sense of purpose
- Setting high expectations for performance
- Role modeling behaviors and practices
- Designing and managing the teaching and learning program
- Establishing effective teams within the school staff, and distributing leadership among the school staff
- Understanding and developing people
- Protecting teachers from issues which would distract them from their work
- Establishing school routines and norms for behaviors
- Monitoring performance
- Connecting the school to parents and the community
- Recognizing and rewarding achievement

## **Beliefs, attitudes, and personal attributes**

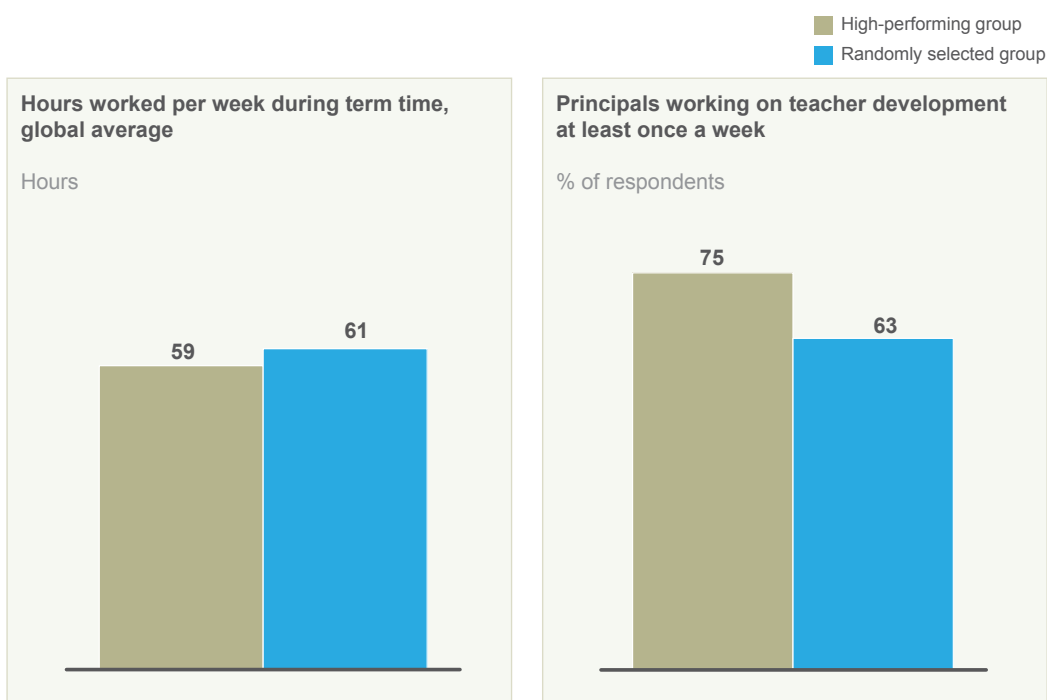
- Focused on student achievement; puts children ahead of personal or political interests
- Resilient and persistent in goals, but adaptable to context and people
- Willing to develop a deep understanding of people and context
- Willing to take risks and challenge accepted beliefs and behaviors
- Self-aware and able to learn
- Optimistic and enthusiastic

The international survey conducted as part of this research largely reconfirms existing knowledge about the roles which effective school leaders play, and demonstrates that this knowledge applies across a range of systems in different contexts:

- Almost all principals say that setting vision and direction, supporting the development of staff, and ensuring effective management systems and processes are the biggest contributors to the success of their school.
- All principals, and particularly high performers, are motivated mainly by their ability to make a difference, though early experiences of leadership and exposure to role models make a strong contribution, particularly for high performers.
- High-performing principals focus more on instructional leadership and developing teachers. They see their biggest challenges as improving teaching and curriculum, and they believe that their ability to coach others and support their development is the most important skill of a good school leader.
- High performers are more likely to report that they greatly enjoy teaching.
- High-performing principals are distinguished less by who they are, and more by what they do (though both are important). They work the same hours as other principals, but spend more time working with the people in their school. They walk the halls more, spend more time coaching teachers, interact more often with parents and external administrators, and spend more time with students.

Exhibit 2

### High-performing principals do not work longer hours than other principals but do spend their time differently



Source: International Survey of School Leaders 2010

- High-performing principals find supporting the improvement of other schools and leaders attractive and do this more frequently than other principals.

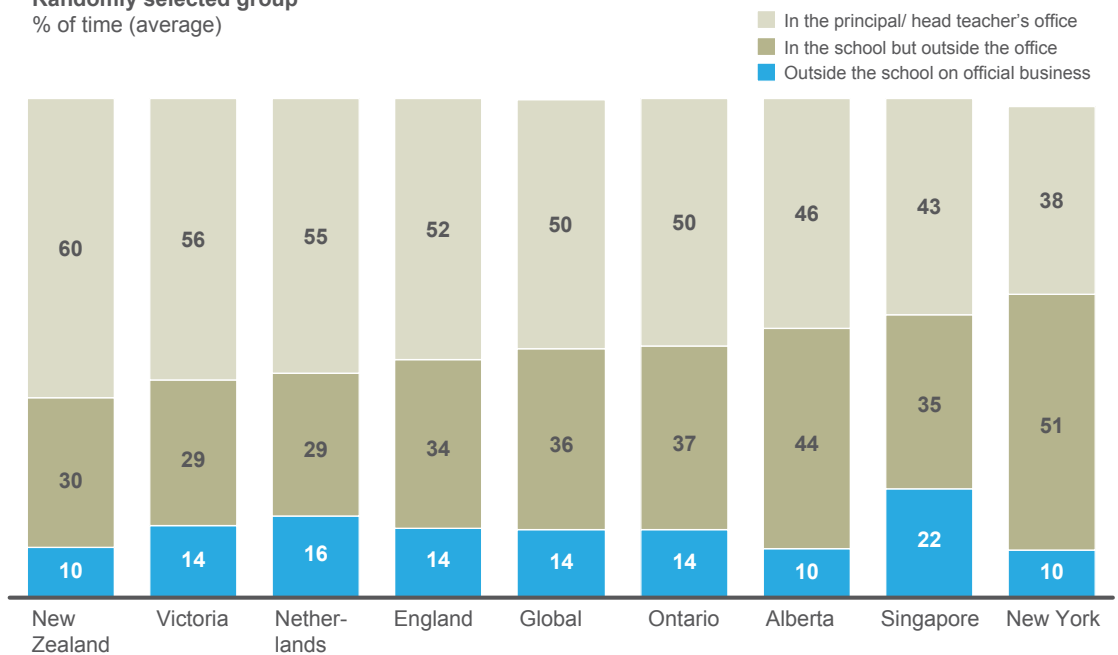
Despite differences in context, the similarities between what principals do, what motivates them, and what they find supportive in different systems greatly outnumber the differences. Among the differences, principals in Singapore and New York stand out on a number of dimensions. Principals in those systems spend less time in their offices (see exhibit 3), focus more on coaching and developing staff, and are promoted faster than in other systems, with the majority reporting less than 20 years' experience in education.

Finally, differences in what leaders do are not directly related to the level of autonomy they are given. Internationally, there is no relationship between the degree of autonomy enjoyed by a school principal and their relative focus on administrative or instructional leadership.<sup>9</sup>

Exhibit 3

### Breakdown of time spent working

Randomly selected group  
% of time (average)



Source: International Survey of School Leaders 2010



# The identification and development of future leaders

“An organization has more potential leaders than it realizes”

The research on school leadership shows that “a small handful of personal traits explain a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness.”<sup>10</sup> While many of the skills required of a principal can be acquired by anyone with the right support and motivation, “some [people] develop those capacities much more readily than others, and some do it to a much higher level.” By implication, attracting and selecting those with the right qualities is critical to the overall leadership capacity of the system.

Around the world, school systems rely on three types of approach to unlocking and developing future leadership talent:


- The first depends primarily on self-identification by potential leaders and informal mechanisms by which potential leaders are coached and given opportunities to develop within schools.
- The second builds on the first by providing opportunities for potential leaders to take courses or join programs to build their capacity and interest in leadership.
- The third approach goes further, proactively guiding the careers of potential leaders so that they gain progressively greater leadership experience through new roles taken on within their schools with guidance and support.

## Exhibit 4

### Senior leaders in most high-performing private-sector organizations play an active role in leadership development

#### Company

#### Role in people/leadership development

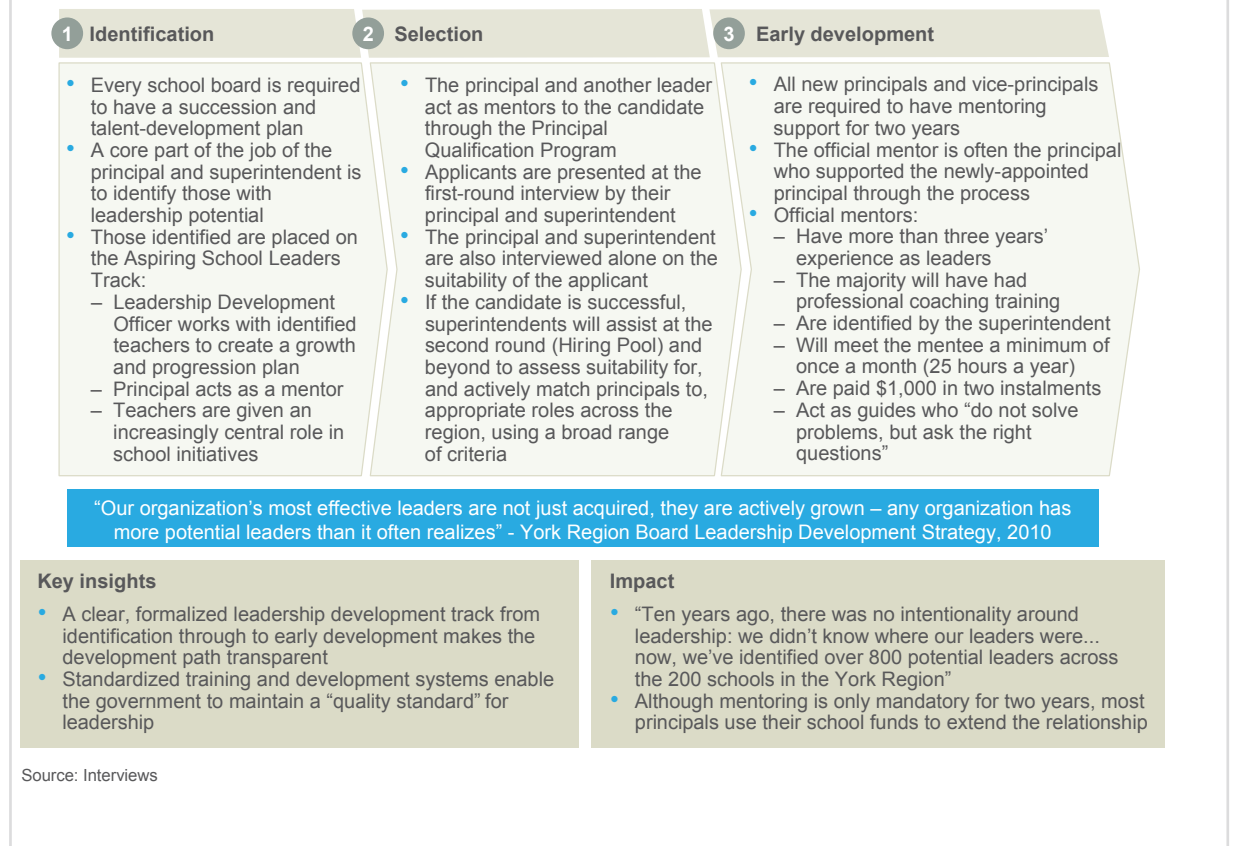
<p><b>General Electric</b></p> 	<p>Jack Welch: “Owned” the top 600 executives and spent a substantial portion of his time attracting, evaluating, promoting, and deploying them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Managing top 600 executives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Approved the slate of candidates for top 600 positions</li> <li>– Personally reviewed top 600 people</li> <li>– Involved in selection and compensation for 125 in detail</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Developing top 600 executives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Dedicated 3-4 weeks to annual development reviews</li> <li>– Involved in all training/development meetings for GE's top 600 for almost 2 months/year</li> <li>– Supervised Crotonville<sup>1</sup> directly; appeared every 2 weeks to interact in classes</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><i>“I spend all my time on people. It is people first, strategy second. The day we screw up the people thing, this company is over”</i> Jack Welch, former CEO</p>
<p><b>Procter &amp; Gamble</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>CEO and head of HR conduct annual talent evaluation</b> of top 200 executives in the company</li> <li>• Talent development is regarded as leaders' responsibility             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Managers are <b>evaluated on their contributions to people development</b></li> <li>– CEO personally <b>teaches leadership development courses</b> to most senior managers</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Additionally, P&amp;G uses an IT-based talent-management system covering 138,000 employees, and especially tracking 13,000 middle-/upper-management employees             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Broad information about succession planning</li> <li>– Identification of top talent and their development needs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

<sup>1</sup> GE's specialized learning facility

Sources: GE Performance Ethic Fingerprint; press search

Exhibit 5

## York Region, Ontario: integration of identification, selection, and development



### *Proactively managing leadership opportunities*

Education systems that take this third approach, in the words of an Ontario leadership strategy document, are guided by a belief that “an organization has more potential leaders than it often realizes”<sup>11</sup> and that a more proactive approach can unleash that talent. This is similar to what happens in high-performing organizations in the business sector, where the identification and development of future leaders is increasingly viewed as a critical capability. High-performing organizations identify potential leaders early and have mechanisms for developing their talents over time, for example by providing them with opportunities to gain leadership experience, rather than expecting them to emerge or sending them through training programs just before they assume leadership responsibility. At General Electric (GE), (see exhibit 4), high-potential executives are “managed like a chessboard.” Potential leaders are identified early at

each level of the organization and tracked thereafter. They are offered carefully selected positions and opportunities to test and challenge them as leaders: “We try to give our very best people experiences before they are ready. We believe the payoffs far outweigh the risks: your best development opportunity is your next job.”

Some of the school systems reviewed are moving in a similar direction:

- Ontario: School leadership development practices vary between districts in Ontario, with some having more developed systems for identifying and selecting leaders than others. All districts are required to have a succession and development plan. Some, however, have gone further and begun to manage succession proactively. For instance, York Region, where principals and superintendents are expected to nurture aspiring leaders, has identified 800 potential future leaders across its 200 schools (see exhibit 5).

Exhibit 6

## New York Leadership Academy Aspiring Principals Program

About the academy	Aspiring Principals Program (APP)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launched in 2003</li> <li>• Independent, non-profit organization that recruits, develops, and supports school leaders</li> <li>• Supports aspiring principals through APP</li> <li>• Develops experienced leaders through tailored coaching</li> <li>• Trains principals to open new small schools in high-need areas</li> <li>• Public funding since 2008</li> </ul>	<p><b>Overview</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14-month program that combines theory with experiential learning</li> <li>• Three phases of instruction                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Six-week summer simulation of school leadership challenges</li> <li>– Ten-month school-based residency</li> <li>– Summer planning to ease transition</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Selection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum five years' work experience (&gt;three years as a K-12 teacher)</li> <li>• Interview process components: two written essays, worded problem-solving question, data analysis, group-based activity, individual interview</li> </ul> <p><b>Course</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants taken out of their current school</li> <li>• Department of Education pays salary</li> <li>• Mentored by principal</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key statistics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16% of current NYC principals are graduates</li> <li>• APP graduates filled 73 of 281 vacancies last year</li> <li>• 35 participants enrolled 2010/11</li> <li>• 90% "very happy" with the APP support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidates attend a bi-weekly leadership development session at the academy</li> <li>• Run by experienced/retired principals and/or superintendents</li> <li>• Graduates given specialist support on data and budgeting</li> <li>• NYCLA is accountable for graduate results</li> </ul> <div style="background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p><i>"The APP is perhaps the best leadership training program that I have ever seen in any institution, period"</i></p> </div>

**Increase in percentage of students earning 10+ credits over time**

Year	APP (%)	Non-APP (%)
2005/06	53	57
2006/07	64	58

Source: Interviews at New York Leadership Academy

■ Singapore: Schools are responsible for identifying potential leaders, normally during their first five years of teaching. Once identified, teachers are put on to a "leadership track" which provides them with a series of opportunities progressively to take on greater leadership responsibilities, combined with a set of formal training programs. Superintendents and principals are expected to apprentice potential leaders in their schools. In addition, and while relying primarily on an apprenticeship model, Singapore has created a six-month course to build strategic leadership skills to support those vice-principals (whose role is a more administrative one) stepping up to principal.

and action plan in collaboration with headteachers, work with governors to improve recruitment and selection, and put in place more systematic talent-identification processes. Since the approach was implemented, more teachers have expressed interest in leadership and fewer schools and local authorities have reported recruitment difficulties, despite unprecedented retirement levels.

There is some evidence from the international survey that systems adopting these strategies are more effective at supporting the development of leaders than those that rely on other approaches. The survey shows that:

■ England: Local authorities are encouraged to work with schools to develop local succession-planning strategies, with support and guidance from the National College. Local authorities use data and models to understand the scale and nature of their succession-planning challenge, develop a strategy

■ Early experience of leadership roles is one of the main reasons for becoming a principal, and is more likely to be cited as a main reason by high-performing principals (48 percent) than randomly selected principals (34 percent)

- More than three-quarters of principals say either “being identified as a potential leader” or “opportunities to take on leadership responsibility” was a major contributor to their development, with a large proportion selecting both
- High-performing school leaders who had worked as a deputy generally described this as a major contributor to their development (74 percent of those who had experienced it described it as a major contributor, 21 percent as a minor contributor).

Furthermore, there is some evidence that a more proactive approach to identifying and selecting leaders produces school leaders who are more representative of society as a whole. For instance, Singapore, with its tightly managed succession-planning process, has the largest proportion of female principals of any system in the study (or indeed of any system anywhere as far as we are aware). Similarly, in the business sector, stronger succession planning has been identified as one of the main contributors to increased diversity in leadership groups.

A few other countries, districts, and programs, including New Leaders for New Schools, Accelerate to Headship program, and the Aspiring Principals Program at the New York Leadership Academy (see exhibit 6), have developed short, intense, practical courses to prepare teachers quickly for leadership positions. The evidence suggests that these are effective, with a significant improvement in student results in schools led by principals trained on these programs.

### *Making principal positions more attractive*

In general, the systems studied emphasized that developing talent is more important than increasing the attractiveness of leadership positions. However, a number of systems have tried to make school leadership more attractive:

- Singapore and New York set high salaries to increase the attractiveness of the principal’s role. For instance, in New York, principals can earn up to \$200,000 per annum.
- The Netherlands and New York have both made it possible for leaders from outside education to become school leaders. New York’s partnership

with New Leaders for New Schools, through which candidates can become principals after a relatively short period of teaching, has attracted a significant number of applicants who later matched or exceeded the performance of their peers. However, in The Netherlands, programs to recruit business leaders to run schools have had much more limited success.

- New York is researching ways to overcome the reluctance of some schools to develop future principals (their reluctance stemming from a fear that they will lose good deputy principals when they are promoted to principal positions). Options include paying financial bonuses to schools which develop candidates who are successfully appointed as principals, and making the development of future leaders an indicator in principals’ performance reviews.
- In England trained school business managers and directors provide management support to headteachers, significantly reducing their workload and administrative burden (two of the main factors that discourage teachers from applying for leadership positions).

# The selection and placement of school leaders

“Replacing an outstanding principal is the toughest and most frightening experience of your life”

The selection and appointment process varies widely across school systems (see exhibit 7).

## Emphasis on long-term assessments of potential

Several education systems are reducing the weight given to interviews and tests during the selection process, and increasing the emphasis on long-term assessments of leadership skills and potential. In the words of a system leader from New York: “The best way to select principals is to watch them work. After six months, you know who you want.”

For example:

- In some districts in Alberta, superintendents are highly involved in the selection of school principals. Superintendents are expected to observe, assess, and support potential leaders over a long period and advise them during the application process.
- In The Netherlands, teachers aspiring to be leaders can join “development pools” where they undertake a part-time theoretical and practical course lasting up to three years. At the end of this time, teachers are expected to decide whether school leadership is right for them, and whether they are able to perform the role.

Exhibit 7

## Selection and appointment of principals

	Who makes selection decisions	How decisions are made	Whether the system matches leaders to schools	Mandatory requirements <sup>5</sup>
<b>Alberta</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Superintendent informed by committee<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Panel interview</li> <li>Written test (varies)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Must be enrolled on any Masters program</li> </ul>
<b>England</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elected/appointed school governing body</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Must hold National Professional Qualification for Headship</li> </ul>
<b>Netherlands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elected school board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Typically panel interview, but left to school boards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> </ul>
<b>New York</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Principal Candidate Pool Panel<sup>3</sup></li> <li>School hiring committee<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two interview rounds: for pool and for position</li> <li>Presentation</li> <li>Q&amp;A session</li> <li>Informal panel meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No – except for executive principals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School Building Leader (SBL) and any Masters degree</li> </ul>
<b>New Zealand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elected school board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Panel interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> </ul>
<b>Ontario</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion readiness committee (first round)</li> <li>Hiring committee (second round)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two panel interview rounds: for pool and for position</li> <li>Interviews of superintendent and principal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes: superintendents match principals to schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Must have passed Principals' Qualification Program (PQP)</li> </ul>
<b>Singapore</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministry of Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>360° assessment</li> <li>Record of service</li> <li>Observation at NIE</li> <li>Situational exercises</li> <li>Panel interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes: ministry matches principals to schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In general, must complete Principal training program</li> </ul>
<b>Victoria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regional Network Leader</li> <li>Selection panel<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentation</li> <li>Informal panel meeting</li> <li>Panel interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No – except for Executive Class Principals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Committee composed of superintendent, deputy superintendent, principal from another school, teacher from the incoming school

<sup>2</sup> Nominee of the Secretary of the DEECD (therein the chairperson), Regional Network Leader, member accredited by the

Merit Protection Board, practising principal, member of local community, member of school staff

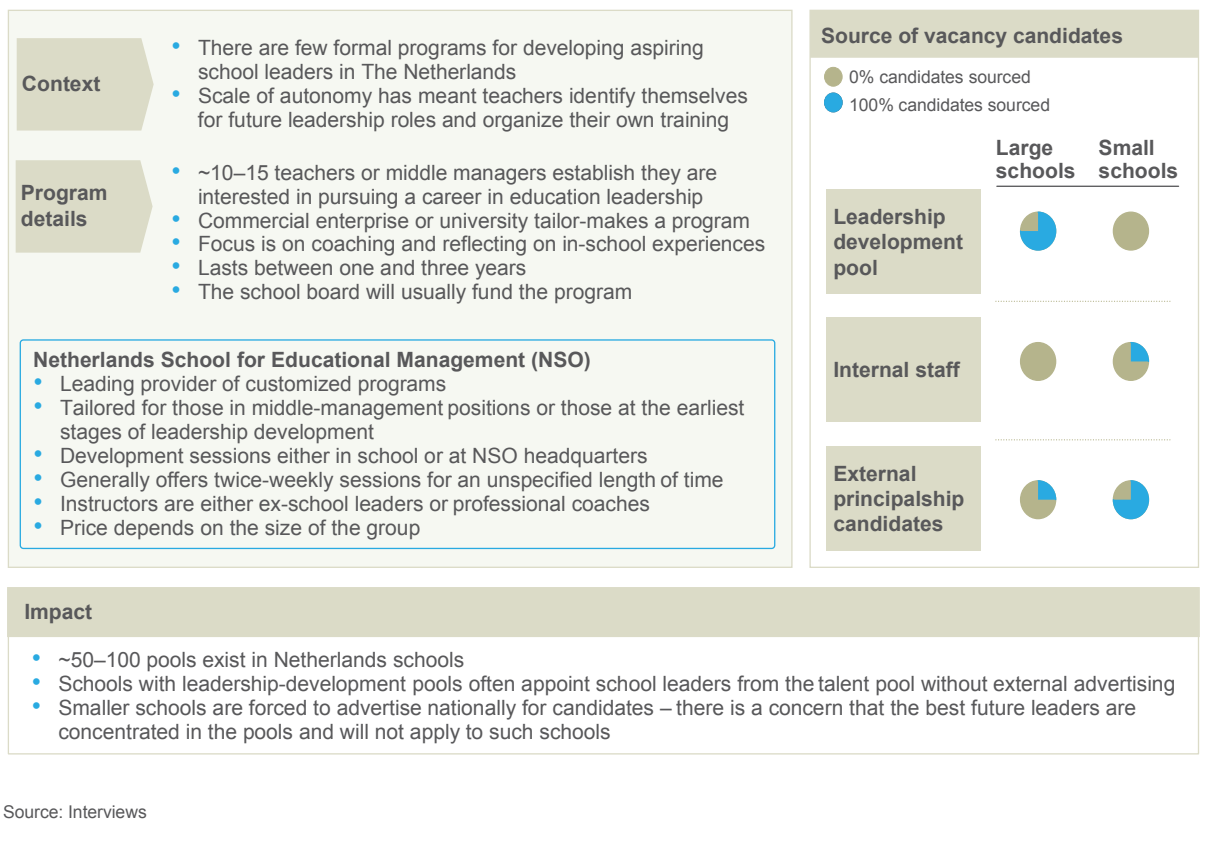
<sup>3</sup> Including parents, teachers, superintendent

<sup>4</sup> Superintendent, senior leadership team, parents, neighbouring principal, member of the School Council

<sup>5</sup> Other than being a certified teacher

## Exhibit 8

## The Netherlands: development pools

*Formal qualifications*

In general, the education systems in the review attach little significance to formal qualifications for school leadership, although several require or expect completion of a leadership development program. Of the systems included in the review:

- England and Ontario have mandatory qualifications that require knowledge of the theory, as well as the practice, of school leadership.
- In several systems principals are expected to have completed some formal qualification program, even if the qualification itself is not mandatory (for example, Alberta and Singapore).
- In all of the systems, the vast majority of principals complete either a pre-appointment program or an induction program. Globally, these programs have grown in number since the mid-1990s.<sup>12</sup>

There is some evidence that the requirement to hold a qualification helps improve the quality of school leadership. In England, the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) has helped to improve the capacity and performance of England's school leaders. For instance, 43 percent of schools led by an NPQH graduate raised their standards of leadership and management between 2005 and 2008, as assessed by independent inspectors, compared to 33 percent of schools not led by an NPQH graduate. System leaders in England expect that recent changes to the NPQH program, including the 36-hour assessment center which applicants must attend at the start of the program, the mandatory placement in a high-performing school, and the final evaluation at the end of the course, will increase its impact even further.

Exhibit 9

### Qualifications to become a principal

	Qualification	Description
<b>England</b>	National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personalized leadership programme based on individual development needs</li> <li>Designed for those who will be credible applicants for headship within 12 to 18 months</li> <li>Duration is 4 to 12 months, depending on the participant</li> <li>Participants can access a range of opportunities including national learning materials, placements, peer learning and support, coaching, online resources, and a mandatory placement of 5 to 20 days in a high-performing designated leadership development school</li> </ul>
<b>Ontario</b>	Principals Qualification Program (PQP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Covers leadership through both theoretical (120 hours) and practical (60 hours) components,<sup>1</sup> all tied directly to school leadership</li> <li>The practical component involves an in-school principal-type project, with observation</li> <li>Mentoring is part of the program (with a school principal and a professional mentor)</li> </ul>
<b>New York</b>	School Building Leader (SBL) and any Masters degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consists of nine courses;<sup>2</sup> only one of these courses deals directly with school leadership</li> <li>There is also one practicum directly related to school leadership: a 320-hour administrative internship aimed at leadership within decision-making contexts, community relations, program development and evaluations, and supervision of staff</li> <li>Teacher must complete 175 hours of professional development in 5 years to maintain SBL</li> </ul>
<b>Alberta</b>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not mandatory, but highly recommended, that prospective principals either complete or be near completion of a Masters degree in education or educational leadership</li> <li>4 higher-education institutions currently provide these courses in Alberta</li> </ul>
<b>Victoria</b>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No qualifications required (except to be a qualified teacher)</li> </ul>
<b>Singapore</b>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministry has discretion over appointments, but most candidates have progressed through the leadership track and completed NIE's leadership program</li> </ul>
<b>New Zealand</b>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No qualifications required (except to be a qualified teacher)</li> </ul>
<b>Netherlands</b>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No qualifications required</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Content tied around 5 leadership domains: Setting Directions, Building Relationships and Developing People, Developing the Organization, Leading the Instructional Program, and Securing Accountability

<sup>2</sup> Ethics, law, technology; school leadership: computer-based technologies in education; educational policy; research and evaluation in schools; technology in school administration; management theory and organizational behavior; supervision in schools; and an administrative Internship

Source: International review



# Opportunities available to serving school leaders

“We are moving from pulling people out of schools to making schools engines for building talent”

Finding ways to develop school leaders was cited as a critical practice by all of the system leaders. Across the systems, several common themes stand out:

- Intensive support for new school leaders
  - Increasing use of clusters, networks, and other lateral learning
  - Increasing focus on delivering support in the context of an improvement objective
  - Increasing opportunities for high-performing principals to take on leadership responsibilities outside their own school
  - Traditional formats still rated as effective in some cases
  - Evaluating school leaders can support their development
- Appraisals. New principals are exempt from formal appraisals during their first year. Mentors help the principal develop goals which are shared with the superintendent. At the end of the year the goals are discussed in relation to performance, but there is no formal evaluation. Correspondingly, fewer principals in Ontario cite accountability as an obstacle to becoming a school leader than in almost any other system (see exhibit 10).
  - Learning Networks. Each school joins one of 22 Learning Networks, facilitated by the Institute for Educational Leadership. These networks serve as a “hub” to facilitate relationships focused on learning from and with other school leaders.
  - Duo Banzen (shared jobs) in The Netherlands, in which primary schools offer new leaders the chance to take up a part-time leadership role alongside a colleague. The program aims to support the development of new school leaders and ease their transition to a principal position.<sup>13</sup>

## Support for new school leaders

All of the systems provide support for new school leaders, and there is a consensus that this is essential both for improving their effectiveness and for supporting their transition into a full leadership role. Most programs last one or two years and include mentoring, formal training sessions, and opportunities to network with other new school leaders. Examples of support for new leaders from the systems reviewed include:

- First year support in Ontario, consisting of three main parts:
  - Mentoring. Newly appointed principals and vice-principals are required to have mentoring support for their first two years in position. This is provided by experienced principals who are identified by the superintendent and paid \$1,000 (£600) each year. Survey responses in Ontario suggest that mentees valued this service highly. Ontario is currently piloting a similar approach for district leaders.

Though support for school leaders is universal, the survey evidence suggests that there is a wide variation in how much training individual school leaders receive both within and between systems (see exhibit 11). Two-thirds of school leaders in Singapore say they have received more than 400 hours of organized training for their role, compared to just 15 percent or fewer in New Zealand and Ontario.

There is good evidence that leaders who engage in formal programs are more effective, particularly when the training they receive is of a high quality. For instance, evidence from England shows that schools led by leaders who participate in formal training programs improve faster than other schools, and that leaders who engage the most improve the fastest.



Exhibit 10



### *Increasing use of lateral learning including networks and clusters*

A number of education systems are increasing the opportunities for school leaders to learn from one another, particularly through networks and clusters. The international survey suggests that these opportunities are valued more highly than other development interventions. This finding mirrors a recent survey of the top 200 executives in 50 multinational companies,<sup>14</sup> which rated “learning from peers” and “on-the-job learning” as the most effective ways to learn. The survey also shows that lateral learning is already common in all the education systems, and that almost all principals (88 percent of randomly selected and 94 percent of high performers) visit other schools to learn from them at least once a year.

A strong network focus – achieved either through common, tightly specified goals, or high levels of accountability – and a strong supporting network

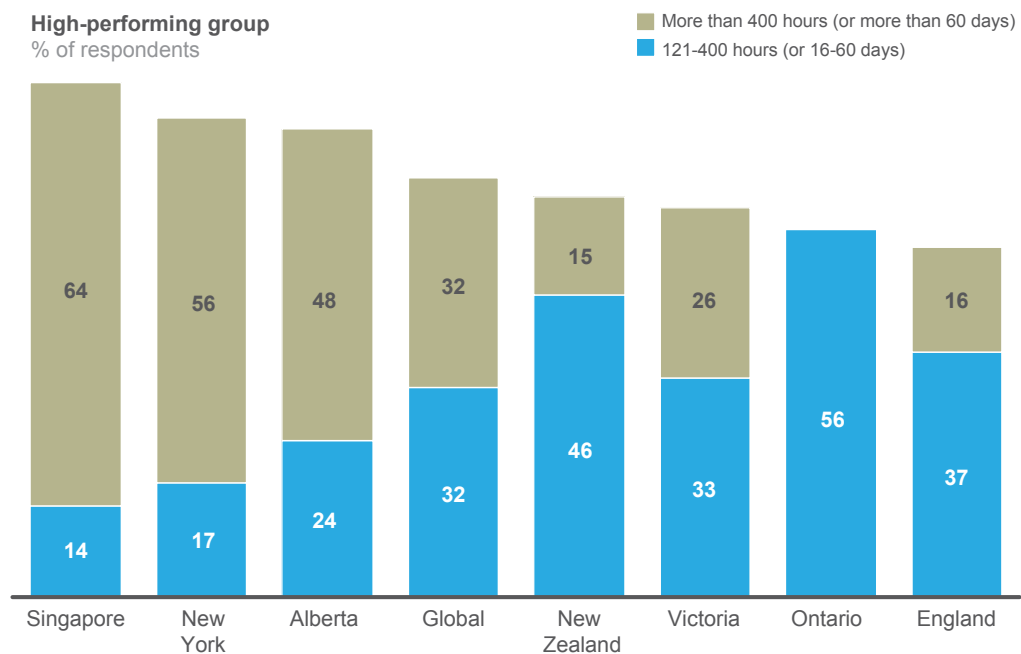
infrastructure are important if the network is to function effectively. Networking can be ineffective when poorly managed, or worse still lead to the recycling of bad practice.

Examples of network and cluster models in the review include:

- Learning Networks (Ontario). York region has 22 geographically organized learning networks, each focused on one of 13 areas of school performance (parameters) and including approximately five to ten schools. “Schools are members of one network at a time and networks are very specific, very deep. Schools cannot move around [the networks]. They are kept focused on one priority at a time.” The networks have no regular staffing or annual funding; the superintendents act as coordinators and rely on principals, school leadership teams, and superintendents to bring in the necessary stakeholders and knowledge.

Exhibit 11

## Number of school leaders who have completed more than 120 hours of organized training for school leadership

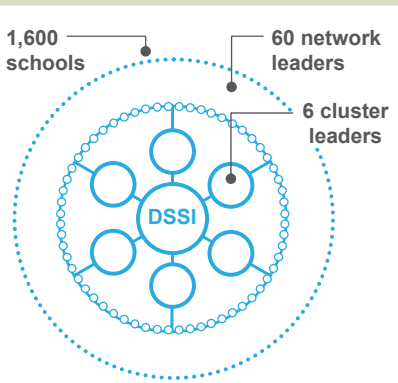


Source: International Survey of School Leaders 2010

- Middle-leadership development in clusters (England). Strong schools can apply for a licence to run the national middle-leadership program across a cluster of schools (ranging from three to 55 schools). Up to two effective leaders are trained in ways to facilitate the program, and core materials and resources are provided, though the schools are free to tailor the materials and approach to suit their particular context. Each middle leader undertakes a school-based challenge focused on the leadership of teaching and learning, and on ways to reduce variability and narrow gaps in outcomes. Clusters are encouraged to work with a university to gain Masters-level accreditation for the leaders.
- Network and clusters (New York). The network-and-cluster structure in New York (see exhibit 12) is the primary method of delivering school support and improvement, and more than 90 percent of principals say that they are satisfied with the support they receive.
- Clusters (Singapore). Clusters comprise 12-15 schools, each led by a superintendent (who is an experienced high-performing principal). Originally conceived as an operational initiative, clusters have evolved into a more developmental role. The cluster model combines lateral learning (support from other schools in the cluster) with vertical learning (support from the superintendent). All principals and vice-principals in the cluster meet once a month with a specific learning objective. One official describes the clusters as: “One of the most powerful elements of our system... it has worked much better than expected.”

Exhibit 12

### New York: networks and clusters

Networks	Network structure	Clusters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All schools must join a network</li> <li>Networks provide operational and instructional support, opportunities for peer learning, and challenge to school leaders</li> <li>Principals can choose to change network and can collectively choose to change their network leader</li> <li>Networks vary in speciality and focus</li> <li>Each network is led by a network leader. The best network leaders:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Bring principals together, to quality review each other's schools</li> <li>– Provide workshops and coaching according to principals' needs</li> <li>– Hold principals accountable</li> <li>– Allocate time in different schools according to need</li> </ul> </li> <li>Networks are publicly ranked by their schools' performance</li> </ul>	 <p style="text-align: center;">1,600 schools</p> <p style="text-align: center;">60 network leaders</p> <p style="text-align: center;">6 cluster leaders</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DSSI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A school joins one of 60 networks consisting of ~25 schools</li> <li>Schools are encouraged to join the network they can benefit from most rather than a geographically based one</li> <li>Network staff include the Network Leader and 10–12 team members</li> <li>Networks are accountable to clusters (10 networks report to one cluster)</li> <li>Cluster teams include the cluster leader and 4–5 team members</li> <li>The cluster leader is accountable to the Division of School Support and Instruction (DSSI)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The role of the cluster leader is to support the network leaders and minimize variation in network quality</li> <li>Cluster leaders and staff:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Meet regularly with network leaders to assist them with any issues</li> <li>– Arrange meetings and workshops for network teams (a minimum of one three-hour meeting per month)</li> <li>– Train aspiring school leaders by providing the LEAP program</li> </ul> </li> <li>Clusters are reviewed and held accountable based on the performance of their networks</li> </ul>
<p><i>“Only a poor leader needs a supervisor - good principals need partners”</i></p>		<p><i>“When I think of my 300 schools, the reality is my primary focus is not the schools individually, but my networks”</i></p>

Source: Interviews

#### *Increasing focus on delivering support in the context of an improvement objective*

Research on adult learning demonstrates that adults learn best when development is delivered in context (see exhibit 13).

Many of the systems require potential leaders to complete leadership projects as part of their leadership training. As one official in New York stated, “We are moving from pulling people out of schools to making schools engines for building talent: schools are being converted into training grounds for leadership talent.” New York’s Leadership Excellence Apprenticeship Program (LEAP) comprises an intensive six-week summer school, after which participants return to their schools and lead a school project. In Alberta, principals encourage aspiring leaders to take on more responsibility within the school, and in The Netherlands, only teachers who take on extra leadership

roles in the school are considered for the leadership development pool.

Others have responded by delivering leadership development primarily in the context of system goals. For instance, in Victoria, leadership development is increasingly seen as “a by-product of system improvement focused on a specific goal” rather than as a separate activity. Superintendents, coaches, and learning networks support principals to achieve a goal in their schools, building their leadership capacity in the process, rather than building their leadership capacity first to enable them to achieve goals in the future. In the words of a leader in Victoria, “our whole purpose is delivering improvement – we’re not interested in leadership development for its own sake.”

Several of the systems, including Victoria and England, are also investing in the development of other school leaders (for instance heads of department or deputy

Exhibit 13

### Leadership development based on principles of effective adult learning

In a leadership development program this means		
Adults learn best ...	This ...	Not this
<b>When they are motivated</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure learning matters by building it around strategic projects with measurable impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Stand-alone training without direct relevance to current challenges"</li> </ul>
<b>When they are in charge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involve candidates in shaping their learning agenda</li> <li>Help them understand why successes and failures occur</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"The trainer sets the learning agenda – the learners follow"</li> <li>"Declare success – hide failure"</li> </ul>
<b>When they are at the edge of their comfort zone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stretch people to do more than they think possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Do what you know – just better"</li> </ul>
<b>Through action and experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply action and reflection learning activities (forum and fieldwork, experiential)</li> <li>Connect learning to previous experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"It's all in the big book we handed out on Day 1"</li> <li>"I'll tell you something that's completely new to you"</li> </ul>
<b>When their individual learning style is accounted for</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide activities tailored to different learning preferences (audio, visual, experiential, reflective)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"All learners are similar"</li> </ul>
<b>From role models</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage senior leaders to role-model desired behavior and support learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Learning and training is something for junior leaders and below"</li> </ul>
<b>From their peers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enable a peer community to develop (e.g. via shared forum)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Isolated individuals"</li> </ul>
<b>When supported by effective processes and systems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide learning infrastructure: material, portals, course catalogues, policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Training without learning infrastructure"</li> </ul>
<b>With just-in-time support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Install on-the-job mentoring systems to support application of new content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"We teach you everything in one day"</li> </ul>

Source: McKinsey review of 25 theories of adult learning and leadership development

principals). There is good evidence that this can improve the effectiveness of schools, build additional leadership capacity, and develop a pool of talent in each school and across the system which contributes to succession planning.

#### *Increasing opportunities for high-performing principals to take on responsibilities outside their own school*

A recent trend in several systems is the creation of opportunities for outstanding school leaders to play a role in developing other schools.


- **New York: Executive Principals.** Since 2008, top-performing principals have been seconded into struggling schools in high-need areas for a minimum of three years. In return, they get recognition and financial incentives including a \$25,000 salary enhancement and standard

performance bonuses of up to \$25,000. Victoria runs a similar program for "executive-class principals". While it is too early for a comprehensive assessment of these initiatives, anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of schools are showing steady signs of improvement.

- **Victoria. The High Performing Principals Development Program** aims to develop the best principals into system leaders over a two-year period. Principals on the program are given time and resources (around \$10,000 per principal) to develop as leaders by studying international best practices and identifying potential improvements for their own systems. In the past, principals have travelled to study alternative systems, attended further education at major universities, and developed improvements for the Victoria system. Leaders must also complete an individual professional development project. To date, 10 percent of Victoria's principals have completed

Exhibit 14

## England: National Leaders of Education and National Support Schools



**National Leaders of Education (NLEs) and National Support Schools (NSS) overview**

- NLEs are outstanding school leaders who use their knowledge and experience to provide additional leadership capacity to schools in challenging circumstances. Their main purpose is to ensure a high-quality education for every child
- Support is provided by both the NLE and staff from their own school, which is designated an NSS
- Support ranges from the provision of an executive or interim principal, supported by members of their staff, who leads on specific teaching, learning, and behavior strategies, through to the provision of advice, guidance and targeted interventions
- NLEs and LLEs (Local Leaders of Education) are designated against stringent criteria and are trained and supported by the National College

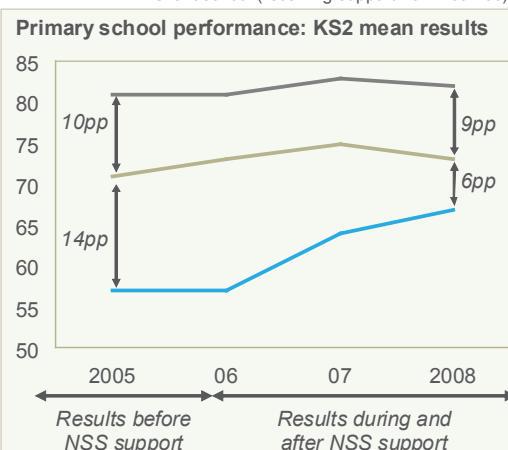
**NLE key facts**

- Introduced October 2006
- NLEs support a school for 1-3 years. When support is no longer required the NLE will switch their support to another school
- Only the very best leaders can be designated as an NLE
- Deployments are organized through the appropriate local authority with the aid of regional consultants
- The Fellowship Program supports NLEs to undertake leadership development at top business schools and provide structured input to national policy each year
- There are 431 NLEs as of May 2010. Aim is to reach 500 by 2012 (300 from primary schools and 200 from secondary)

**Impact**

— National support school  
— National average  
— Client school (receiving support from 2007/08)

**Primary school performance: KS2 mean results**



Year	National support school	National average	Client school
2005	~81	~72	~58
2006	~81	~74	~58
2007	~83	~75	~64
2008	~82	~73	~68

← Results before NSS support
Results during and after NSS support →

Half a million children have benefited from the expertise of NLEs and their NSS staff since October 2006

Source: National College

the program, and it has a satisfaction rating above 90 percent. According to an OECD report: “Participants were stimulated, informed, enthused, and professionally rejuvenated by their experiences. They returned to Victoria with immediate and high-level expertise in the topic they had studied, eager to apply their learning through the leadership of their school. They saw themselves as ‘high-performing learners.’”<sup>15</sup>

- Alberta and Singapore run secondment or internship schemes that place school leaders in the education ministry as part of their career development.
- England designates “National Leaders of Education” (NLEs) and “Local Leaders of Education” (LLEs) and their schools to lead improvement in schools that are identified as struggling. In both cases, these are highly successful head teachers with strong leadership teams that have a proven capacity

to support others. The precise form of support is flexible and based on context. The schools supported by the NLEs, and their own schools, improve faster than other schools, and the work provides opportunities to grow new leaders in both schools.<sup>16</sup>

### *Traditional formats still rated as effective*

While more traditional forms of training and support have become less prominent as a result of the shifts described above, they still prove effective in some cases. For instance:

- New York’s Children First Leadership Workshop is a series of twice monthly workshops focused on different aspects of improving attainment in schools through strong leadership. Overall, 96 percent of principals report that they are very satisfied with the workshops and 74 percent say that their practice has changed as a result.

- In several systems school leaders gave a high rating to administrative training focused on processes which are critical to school performance (for instance timetabling) or on areas which, handled badly, could be a distraction to their main role (for instance, legal issues concerning education for children with special needs). One Canadian official claimed that “teaching ‘grunt-level’ technical skills can achieve much better results in the same context and with the same resources.”
- In general, principals do not regard books and online resources as major contributors to development, although 89 percent of them say that they have made a minor (and perhaps cost-effective) contribution. Singapore and New York are exceptions, with one-third of school leaders saying that books and online resources have made a major contribution to their development. This may reflect a higher quality of resources in those systems.

### *Evaluating school leaders can support their development*

All the systems in the review allow school leaders considerable autonomy in return for performance accountability, although the degree of autonomy and the nature of accountability varies. There is good international evidence that school performance improves when leaders are given greater autonomy and are held to account for their performance.<sup>17</sup>

In several of the systems, fewer than 10 percent of principals stated that formal evaluations had made a major contribution to their development. However, New York and Singapore stand out as systems that place more emphasis on review and accountability processes, and where these processes appear to make a more substantial overall contribution.

- Singapore and New York both conduct regular formal appraisals, which principals rate highly compared to other systems. Around 30 percent of high-performing principals in Singapore and New York described performance reviews as a major contributor to their performance, with a further 50 percent describing them as a minor contributor. Importantly, evaluation is shaped to ensure that leaders focus their time on improving teaching and learning. For instance, in Singapore, the quality

of administration and school operation accounts for just 6 percent of a principal’s overall evaluation score, with most of the remainder devoted to teaching and learning.

- Most systems do not remove low performers, though a few systems are creating mechanisms to help tackle low performance. New York compares each of its schools with similar schools, and grades them through a lettered accountability system from A–F. Schools with a grade below C receive a ‘quality review’ (similar to an Ofsted inspection) every year instead of once every four years, and must replace their principals if they do not improve. Around 50 school leaders leave the system each year as a result. Singapore quickly removes principals who are not performing in order to safeguard the education of children in its schools.
- Positive incentives are rare, but appear to make a contribution when introduced. For instance, both Singapore and New York have bonus systems to recognize and encourage high performance. In New York, the top 20 percent of principals receive bonuses of between \$7,000 and \$25,000 each year. According to one education leader these bonuses show that the system rewards good performance.



# The role and development of middle-tier leaders

“Many principals cannot be successful without the best possible district leadership”

Less is known about good leadership at the “middle tier” (districts and LAs) than about good leadership at school level. Four characteristics of the middle tier may explain this:

- Leaders in the middle tier are further from students and learning than school leaders, and their influence is mediated by a large set of other factors and actors. As a result, it is harder to measure their impact on student learning.
- The structure and role of the middle tier vary greatly between and within different school systems (from those where the middle controls the system, to those where there is no middle tier), making it difficult to undertake comparisons across systems.
- In general, and with notable exceptions, there has been less interest among researchers and policy makers in understanding and improving performance at this level than in understanding and improving performance at the school level.
- As with good school leadership, the evidence shows that good middle-tier leaders and leadership come in many forms and combinations. Identifying common patterns can be challenging.

Nonetheless there is an emerging evidence base on both the potential impact of the middle tier and what good leadership looks like. This evidence base consists mainly of case studies of effective districts and successful district improvements, systematic identification and comparison of high-performing districts (for instance, through the Broad Prize) and larger, data-driven attempts to understand district leadership. These studies suggest that middle-tier leadership has a strong impact on student learning. For instance, one major study showed that an effective district superintendent could influence average student achievement by up to 10 percentile points.<sup>18</sup>

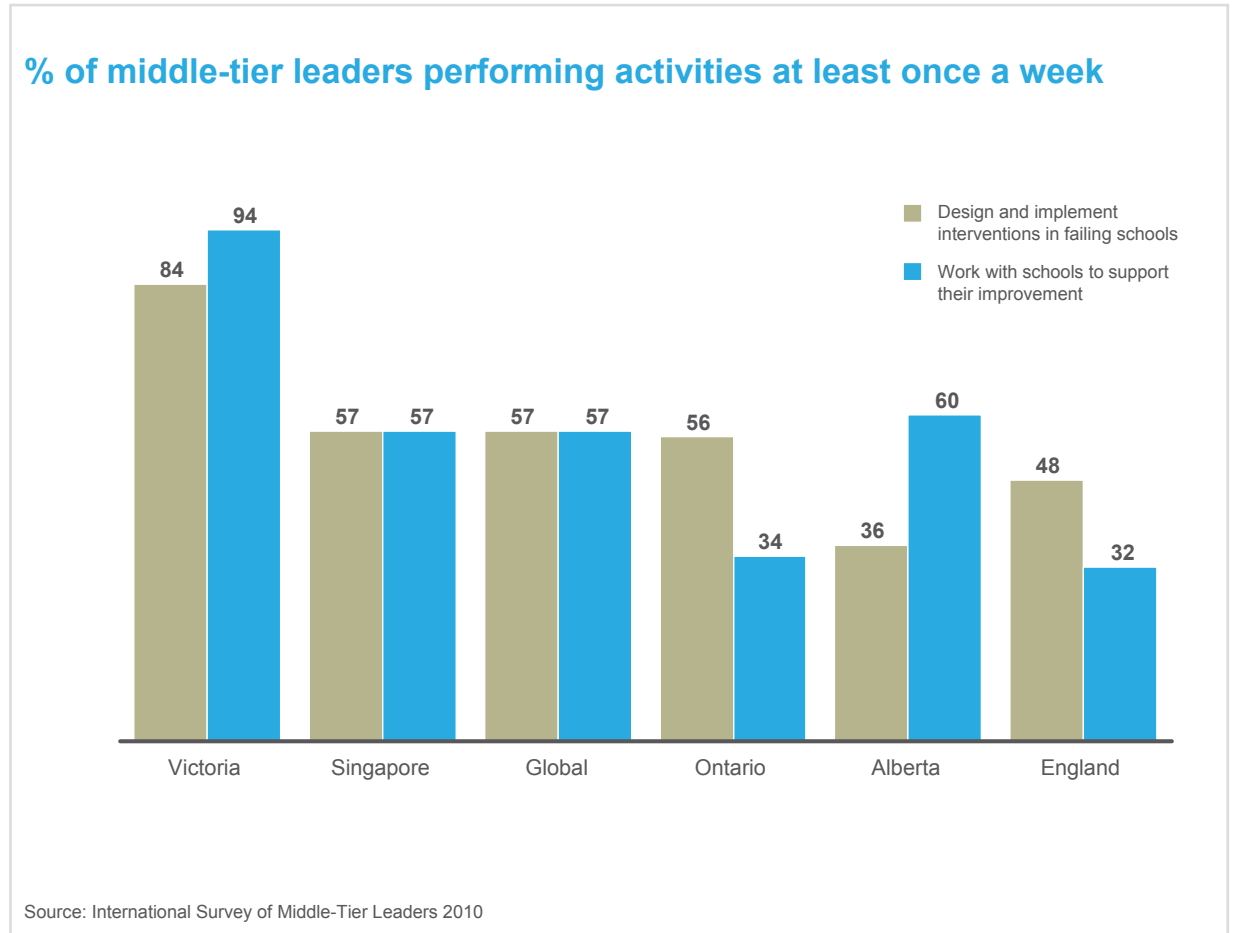
Only six of the systems in the review – England, Singapore, Alberta, Ontario, New York and Victoria – have a system-wide middle tier. This section of the report focuses on these six systems and summarizes findings on the contribution and impact of the middle tier, and what systems are doing to improve its effectiveness.

## *The contribution and impact of the middle tier*

There is a growing body of evidence on the potential for the middle tier both to support and drive and, in other cases, to hinder and obstruct improvement in schools and learning. The review identified five practices which explain the contributions the middle tier can make.

1. Supporting weaker school leaders. Middle-tier leaders can help support weaker school leaders, both improving and supplementing their leadership to raise the overall effectiveness of leadership and management in a school. In the words of one Canadian system leader, “many principals cannot be successful without the best possible district leadership.” Overall, 57 percent of middle-tier leaders surveyed say they support individual schools every week (see exhibit 15). In some systems, such as Victoria, the middle tier is more active in doing this than in others.
2. Delivering effective professional development. The middle tier often plays a crucial role in identifying principals’ development needs and providing appropriate development support. Sometimes, as in New York, this involves deploying existing middle-tier resources (for example a network team). In other systems, this involves facilitating the creation of other relationships to support schools.
3. Managing clusters and lateral learning. In Ontario, New York, and Victoria, the middle tier supports lateral learning by managing networks and clusters. For example, in Victoria, regional network leaders are responsible for promoting and managing learning within their network and helping principals in their network put together a plan with specific goals (see exhibit 17).
4. Strengthening succession planning. In systems that go beyond self-identification, the middle tier usually plays a crucial role in helping identify and develop leadership capacity. Frequently this means ensuring that leaders are developing succession plans and identifying talent in their school. In other systems the middle tier also works directly with aspiring leaders. In Victoria, for instance, entry to “Leaders

Exhibit 15



in the Making”, a program designed to expose participants to the complexities of leadership, relies heavily on regional network leaders identifying and taking ownership of aspiring leaders with the support of their principals. Invitations to join the program can only be made by the regional network leaders.

5. **Strengthening and moderating accountability.** Despite different performance-evaluation systems and consequences, middle-tier leaders in New York, Ontario, Alberta, and Victoria are all heavily involved in principal reviews. This often involves agreeing and setting goals with the principal and supporting them over the course of the year to achieve these goals. In Alberta, Ontario, and Victoria, superintendents help interpret and moderate accountability results.

### *Improving the effectiveness of the middle tier*

Many middle-tier leaders describe their work as challenging, and several interviewees reported a wide variation in the effectiveness of individual middle-tier leaders. One Canadian official noted that “even within provinces or regions there are large variations in performance and effectiveness as individuals lose focus on what is important.”

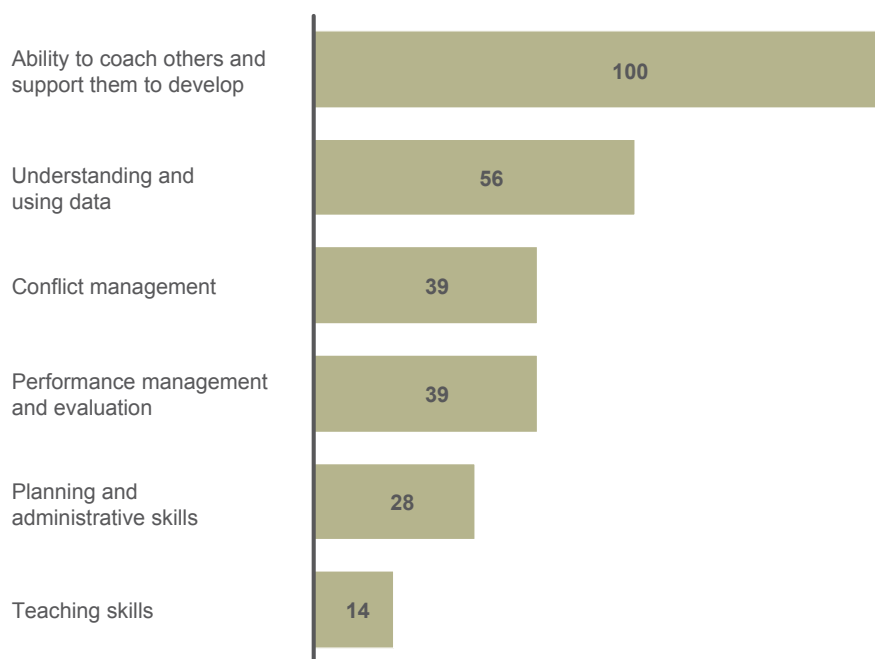
Importantly, the areas which middle-tier leaders describe as the most challenging in the survey are also those they describe as most important to their success (coaching and supporting others, evaluating school performance). The areas they find less challenging are those which they describe as less important (planning, using data).

In most of the systems, middle-tier leaders have less opportunity for professional development than school leaders. In general, interviewees felt that there was



Exhibit 16

### % of leaders selecting each skill as one of the top three most important skills required to be a good leader



Source: International Survey of School and Middle-Tier Leaders 2010

room for improvement in the development and support provided to the middle tier. However, middle-tier leaders say that where such opportunities are available, discussions with peers (79 percent), opportunities to take on responsibility (78 percent), and being identified as a potential leader and given opportunities to enhance their leadership skills (72 percent) make the biggest impact.

Developing the pipeline of talent for middle-tier leadership is also a challenge. The identification of potential middle-tier leaders does not, in general, appear to have reached the same level of consistency and sophistication as the identification of potential school leaders. In most systems in the review, the identification of middle-tier leaders still depends largely on self-identification, with some middle-tier leaders doing more than others to identify the next crop. The biggest obstacle to taking on a system leadership role in education, as reported by middle-tier leaders globally, was “having to work in a corporate or political environment”. This suggests that thought should be

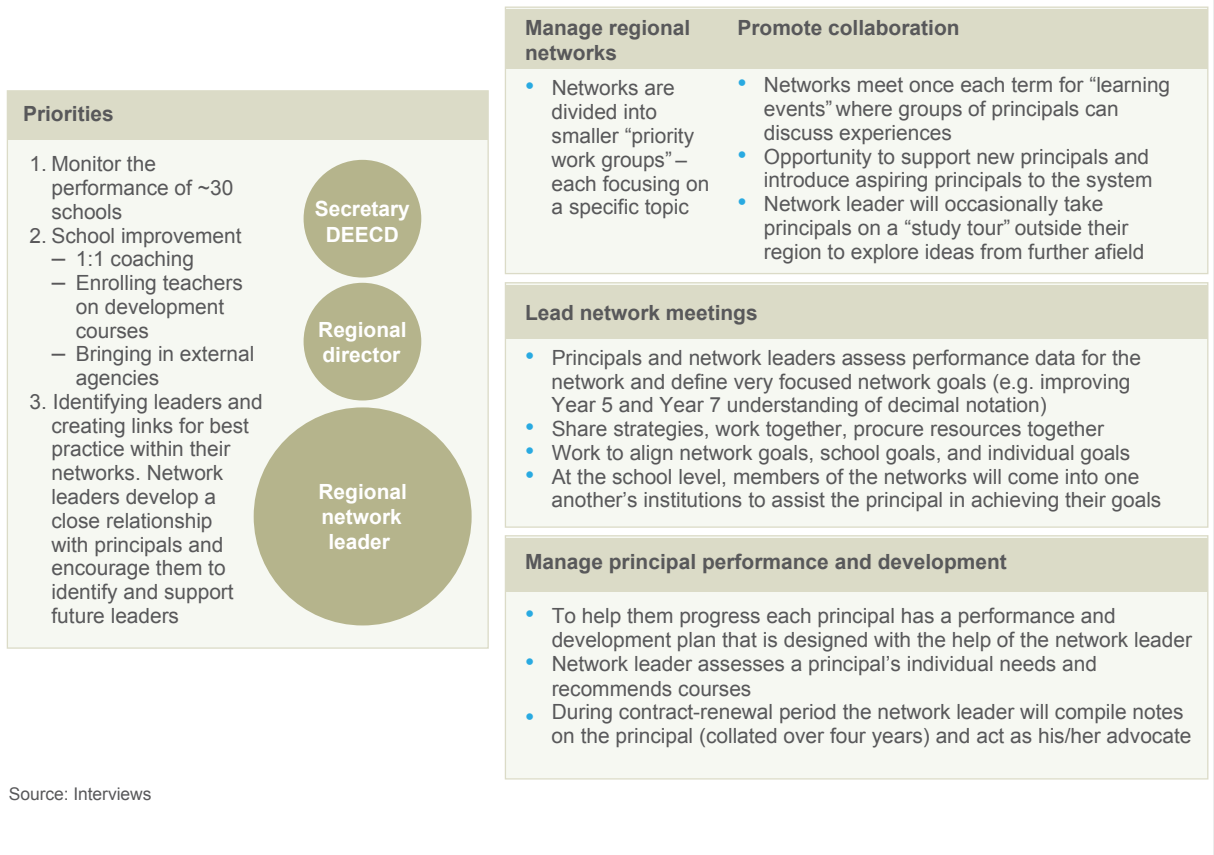
given to making the middle-tier role less politically motivated and more focused on delivering educational outcomes.

Some systems have taken steps toward addressing the challenge of improving middle-tier leadership. For example:

- In England, the National College has introduced a Director of Children's Services (DCS) Leadership Program that is central to the development of serving and aspiring DCSs. Participants receive an executive coach to guide them on their personal journey and are part of a peer-learning group, which addresses the organizational side of the role. All participants in the most recent cohort rated the support provided by the program as 'good' or 'excellent'. In addition, a mentoring scheme (the Mentor Plus Scheme) launched in September 2009 has established 19 DCS mentor relationships for newly appointed DCSs.

Exhibit 17

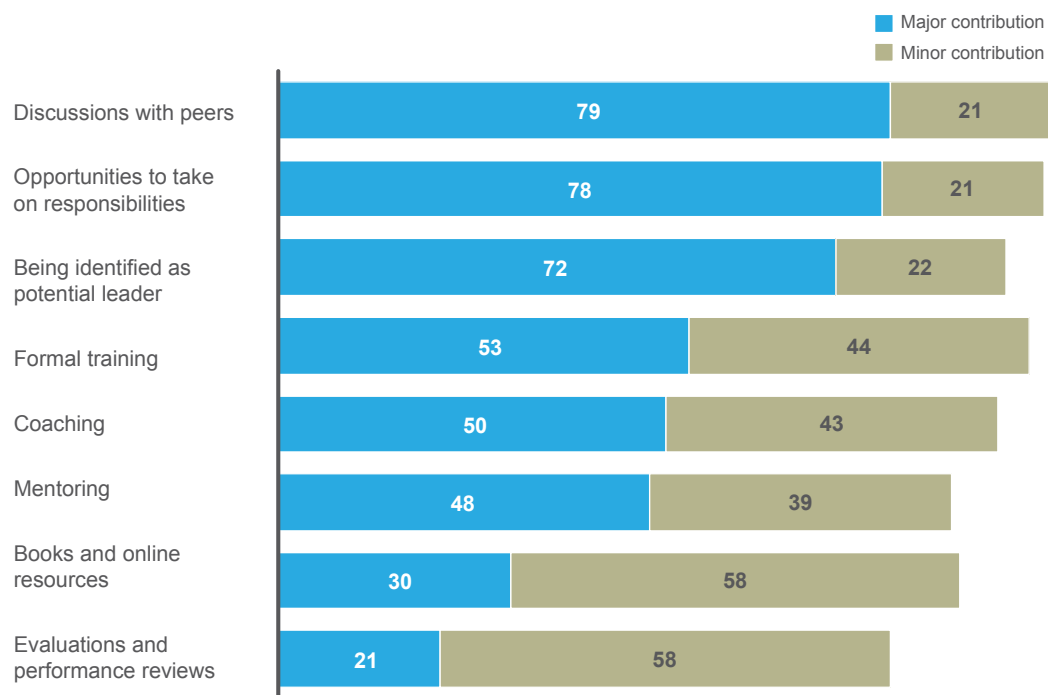
## Victoria: regional network leaders



- In Alberta, secondments of principals and teachers to the Ministry of Education are common, with around 200 secondees among the 800 ministry staff. One Alberta system leader said of this program: “Secondments prevent the ministry from becoming full of career bureaucrats; we bring people to the ministry who are walking the walk. It’s a nice way for teachers to see the other side of education’s internal workings, and can offer a valuable foundation from which they can build their practice.” Four school boards also run a two-year program during which practising and retired supervisors lead workshops for aspiring middle-tier leaders. Some districts require participation in this program prior to assuming a district leader role. Singapore also rotates school leaders into positions within the Ministry of Education as part of their career development.
- In Victoria, districts have found that concentrating the middle tier on the most important activities has significantly improved outcomes. The middle tier has been redefined and refocused as that of a regional network leader focused on supporting the delivery of teaching, learning, and improving. In the words of one Victoria district leader: “The variability in the middle tier can be reduced by ensuring a focus on outcomes; just forget about anything that doesn’t directly impact outcomes.”
- Ontario has introduced a leadership-focused formal qualification, the Supervisory Officers’ Qualification Program, for those aspiring to system leadership. Delivered in four modules, the course consists of 200 hours of class-based theory delivered by practising supervisors, as well as a 50-hour practicum. This involves running a project at district level (a board improvement plan, for example) with an experienced supervisory officer as a mentor to help develop the plan and strategy.

Exhibit 18

### % of middle-tier leaders citing each experience as having a major impact on their development



Source: International Survey of Middle-Tier Leaders 2010

# Conclusion

Across the systems in the review, there is an emerging consensus on the importance of school leadership and how to improve it. The consensus recognizes that:

- Leadership focused on teaching, learning, and people is critical to the current and future success of schools
- High-performing principals focus more on instructional leadership and the development of teachers
- System policies and practices make a difference to leadership capacity
- Leaders are grown through experience and support; actively cultivating them can increase the leadership capacity of the system
- Leaders learn best in context and from a diverse range of sources (including peers, superiors, online resources, and formal training)
- Selecting a school leader is one of the most important decisions for an education system. Ensuring that selection committees have the skills and capabilities required to make the optimum decision is therefore crucial
- Maximizing leadership capacity means regarding the selection and development of leaders as integral parts of the work of schools and the system, rather than discrete processes within it
- While there are many ways to structure the middle tier, an effective middle tier focused on the five practices described on pages 23-24 above is essential if all schools (not just some schools) are to be great schools

Despite the emergence of a strong consensus in these areas (for instance, effective support for new school leaders), some important questions remain unanswered. While most systems now agree on the importance of middle-tier structures, there is still uncertainty about how to maximize their effect. The education sector's approach to performance management and incentives is underdeveloped compared with the business sector. Development of the collective capacity of leadership teams, rather than the individual capacity of leaders, is still limited, despite much research suggesting that collective capacity is a greater driver of performance than individual capacity (see exhibit 19). All systems face challenges to refine, contextualize and optimize the processes they use to support their leaders.

Moreover, the challenge of how to deliver all this at scale is largely unresolved. Most of the systems in the study are relatively small: four of the eight have fewer than one million students, and only one has more than three million. A wider glance at the world's school systems suggests that few of the large systems have begun to tackle the challenge of developing excellent leaders on a large scale (though there are a few notable exceptions).

While the international evidence provides many instances of proven good practice, the leadership premium – one of the most important drivers of improvement in schools – is a long way from being truly captured.

Exhibit 19

## Leadership-team dynamics: on the way down versus on the way up

### Teams on the way down

- People shield those in power from grim facts, fearful of penalty and criticism for shining light on the harsh realities
- People assert strong opinions without providing data, evidence, or solid argument
- The team leader has a very low questions-to-statements ratio, avoiding critical input and/or allowing sloppy reasoning and unsupported opinions
- Team members acquiesce to a decision yet do not unify to make the decision successful, or, worse, undermine the decision after the fact
- Team members seek as much credit as possible for themselves yet do not enjoy the confidence and admiration of their peers
- Team members argue to look smart or to improve their own interests rather than argue to find the best answers to support the overall cause
- The team conducts “autopsies with blame,” seeking culprits rather than wisdom
- Team members often fail to deliver exceptional results and blame other people or outside factors for setbacks, mistakes, and failures

### Teams on the way up

- People bring forth unpleasant facts – “come here, look, man, this is ugly” – to be discussed; leaders never criticize those who bring forth harsh realities
- People bring data, evidence, logic, and solid arguments to the discussion
- The team leader employs a Socratic style, using a high questions-to-statements ratio, challenging people, and pushing for penetrating insight
- Team members unite behind a decision once made and work to make the decision succeed, even if they vigorously disagree
- Each team member credits other people for success yet enjoys the confidence and admiration of his or her peers
- Team members argue and debate, not to improve their personal position, but to find the best answers to support the overall cause
- The team conducts “autopsies without blame” mining wisdom from painful experiences
- Each team member delivers exceptional results, yet in the event of a setback, each accepts full responsibility and learns from mistakes

Source: Collins. J. How the mighty fall and why some companies never give in <sup>19</sup>

## *Notes on sources*

The international review used three sources of data:

- The international literature on school and middle-tier leadership
- A series of interviews carried out in each of the systems profiled, aimed at understanding their policies and processes relating to leadership and the lessons learned from their experiences
- An online survey of 1,850 leaders in the different systems.

In all of the systems, the survey was completed by a randomly selected group of school leaders. In addition, in most of the systems, the survey was also completed by a group of school leaders who had been identified as high-performing. The high performers were identified by the results of school evaluations internal to the individual systems: for instance, in the UK, school leaders were selected on the basis of data from Ofsted, while in New Zealand, selection was based on data from the Education Review Office. Each of the systems was advised that:

- High-performing principals should be interpreted as the top 15 percent of principals in the system
- Selection of these individuals will vary from system to system depending on available data sources. However, the preferred methods would be selection according to objective standard-based assessments of leadership and management (e.g. as in Ofsted's or the ERO's school inspections), or sustained improvement in assessment test scores, or sustained contextual value-added assessment results.

In The Netherlands, no suitable data source was available to select high-performing principals.

# Footnotes

- 1 For instance, Zbar, *How our best performing schools come out on top*, 2008; Christie, P; Butler, D; and Potterton, M., *Schools that Work. Report to the Minister of Education of the Ministerial Committee*, 2007; Campaign for Quality Education, *Education in Pakistan: What Works and Why*, 2007.
- 2 Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, Hopkins, *Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership*, 2006.
- 3 New Leaders for New Schools, *Principal Effectiveness: A new principalship to drive student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and school turnarounds*, 2009, p. 5.
- 4 Tooley, *The Beautiful Tree*, 2009.
- 5 Day, Sammons, David Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood, Gu, Brown, Ahtaridou, Kington, *The Impact of School Leadership on Pupil Outcomes*, 2009.
- 6 OECD, *PISA 2006*, 2007
- 7 Interviews; OECD, *Improving School Leadership*, 2008
- 8 Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood, Gu, Brown, *10 Strong Claims About Successful School Leadership*, 2010; The Education Trust, *Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground*, 2005; McEwan, *10 Traits of Highly Effective Principals*, 2003; OECD, *Improving School Leadership*, 2008; Robinson, *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why*, 2007; Waters, Marzano, McNulty, *Balanced Leadership*, 2006; New Leaders for New Schools, *Principal Effectiveness: A new principalship to drive student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and school turnarounds*, 2009.
- 9 OECD, *First Results From TALIS*, 2009, p. 190.
- 10 Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, Hopkins, *Seven strong claims about successful school leadership*, 2007.
- 11 Ontario, Board Leadership Development Strategy, 2010
- 12 OECD, *School Leadership*, 2009, p. 108.
- 13 A key goal of the program was to get more women into leadership positions (with a target of 30 percent of entire management structure by 2012)
- 14 McKinsey analysis, "People management – how to close the gap to best-practice"
- 15 OECD, "School leadership development strategies: building leadership capacity in Victoria, Australia", 2007
- 16 National College, *Making a Difference*, 2009.
- 17 For instance, Schütz, G., West, M., Wößmann, L., *School Accountability, Autonomy, Choice, and the Equity of Student Achievement: International Evidence from PISA 2003*, OECD, 2007.
- 18 Waters, *School District Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement*.
- 19 Collins, J., *How the Mighty Fall, and Why Some Companies Never Give In* (Random House Business, June 2009), p.77-78.