



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Gwinnett County Public Schools among six large districts nationwide to boost student achievement by implementing “Principal Pipelines”**

Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) is one of six large school districts to boost student achievement by adopting a comprehensive strategy for improving principal effectiveness, according to a new RAND Corporation [report](#).

As part of an \$85 million, six-year initiative funded by The Wallace Foundation, GCPS began building a “principal pipeline” in 2011 by implementing rigorous leader standards, high-quality preservice preparation, selective hiring and placement, and on-the-job support and evaluation for its principals.

The effort paid off: RAND’s report finds that, across all six districts participating in the initiative, building these pipelines produced positive effects on student achievement in reading and math; and by level: in elementary, middle and, in math, high school. Schools with newly placed principals in pipeline districts outperformed comparison schools by 6.22 percentile points in reading and 2.87 percentile points in math. Benefits were large for students in the lowest quartile of performance. In addition, pipelines benefited all schools in a district, not just those with new principals who emerged from the pipelines. The report does not offer individual district results.

**CEO/Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks** was excited for Gwinnett County Public Schools to be a part of this study as it supports the district’s long-standing leadership development initiative. He explains, “It has long been my conviction—backed up by a growing body of research—that a focus on leadership is the key to school improvement. Without strong school leaders, we cannot hope to make the gains our students need and deserve. Leadership matters, especially in our schools. Now, the research that confirms this view is stronger than ever.”

Building principal pipelines also improved principal retention, the report finds. For every 100 new principals, pipeline districts saw nearly eight fewer losses after three years, compared with other districts in the state staffing similar schools.

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The approach was affordable: [a 2017 study of the initiative](#) found that pipelines cost 0.4% of district budgets – or roughly \$42 per student – per year. Another [study](#) found that two years after Wallace funding ended, districts continued to support pipelines with local funding.

“Our study provides compelling evidence that when districts set clear leadership expectations and used those standards to hire, develop, and support strong leaders, then principals, schools, and students benefited,” said Susan Gates, lead researcher on the report, *Principal Pipelines: A Feasible, Affordable, and Effective Way to Improve Schools*, and a senior economist at RAND, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization. “The positive effects were remarkably widespread across grade levels and across districts.”

The other participating districts were: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina, Denver Public Schools in Colorado, Hillsborough County Public Schools in Florida, the New York City Department of Education and Prince George’s County Public Schools in Maryland.

“This groundbreaking study by RAND adds to a roster of findings that together show that building principal pipelines is feasible, affordable, and effective – and can also be sustained,” said Will Miller, president of The Wallace Foundation. “We now have compelling and meaningful evidence that pipelines can be a major strategy for large districts to improve schools and raise student achievement.”

To read the full RAND report and explore other research on the Principal Pipeline Initiative, visit [www.wallacefoundation.org/principalpipeline](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/principalpipeline).

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