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# GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO SCALING  
EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

## CASE STUDY

FEBRUARY 2015



THE BUSH INSTITUTE

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## ABOUT THE GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE AND AREL

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Rooted in President and Mrs. Bush's belief that "excellent schools must first have excellent leaders," the Bush Institute developed the Alliance to Reform Education Leadership (AREL) to dramatically improve the way our Nation's principals are prepared and supported. AREL is the Bush Institute's flagship program which signifies that school leaders are critical in the lives of our children. Because every child deserves an excellent principal, AREL shapes its ideas and actions around its mission of ensuring there is an effective principal, able to significantly advance student achievement, at the helm of every school.

## ABOUT GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS), located in the metro Atlanta area, is the largest school system in Georgia, serving more than 174,000 students in the 2014-15 school year. GCPS has received acclaim as a high-performing urban school district. GCPS was a finalist for the Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2009 and won the Broad Prize in 2010 and again in 2014, co-winning with Orange County Public Schools in Florida.

The district also has been recognized for its effective school leadership and its Quality-Plus Leader Academy (QPLA), a locally created initiative that serves as an umbrella to cover all activities associated with the training and development of GCPS' leaders. The Aspiring Leader Program and the Aspiring Principal Program are specific QPLA activities dedicated to this goal. These programs are designed for teachers aspiring to be assistant principals and assistant principals aspiring to be principals, respectively. GCPS is one of six "Principal Pipeline" districts recognized and supported by the Wallace Foundation.

## ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY

This case study highlights the efforts of Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) to create an intentionally systemic school leadership strategy to improve its schools and raise student achievement. What makes the Gwinnett school leadership case particularly interesting is the fact that the district has taken a wholly comprehensive and multi-pronged approach to school leadership that includes: 1) making school leadership a strategic priority; 2) creating the conditions that enable school leaders to be successful in their roles by driving school and student success; and 3) developing a robust leadership pipeline. These individual building blocks are components of a comprehensive leadership development strategy developed by GCPS. Their integration as part of a comprehensive district strategy and vision for change is a unique and powerful example of a district investing in effective school leadership to improve student achievement.

This case study is intended to illustrate how essential school leadership is as a driver of student achievement, and share GCPS' policies and practices that lead to highly effective school leadership.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	2
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	4
<b>GCPS’ THREE-PRONGED APPROACH TO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP</b> .....	7
<b>MAKE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP A CORE COMPONENT OF DISTRICT STRATEGY</b> .....	8
I.    Supportive District Culture	
II.   Dedicated Staff Resources	
III.  Dedicated Financial Resources	
<b>CREATE THE DISTRICT CONDITIONS THAT ENABLE EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP</b> .....	12
I.    Leadership Philosophy	
II.   School Level Autonomy, Rooted in Accountability	
III.  Centralized Management of Core and Administrative Functions	
IV.   Set Clear Expectations for School Leaders	
<b>BUILD A COMPLETE PIPELINE TO PREPARE AND SUPPORT EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERS</b> ..	17
I.    The Leadership Development Umbrella: Quality-Plus Leader Academy	
a.  Principal Preparation: Aspiring Principals Program (APP)	
i.  Recruitment of High-Potential Principal Candidates	
ii. Selection Process	
iii. Training Sequence and Residency Component	
iv. Graduate Readiness	
b.  Emerging Leader Preparation: Aspiring Leader Program (ALP)	
c.  District Leader Program (DLP)	
d.  Principal Support on the Job: Ongoing Training and Support	
i.  Hiring and Placement	
ii. Induction	
iii. Ongoing Training	
iv. Peer and Supervisor Support	
v.  Evaluation	
e.  Measuring the Effectiveness of the QPLA	
i.  School Leadership Preparedness and Job Retention	
ii. Student Achievement	
f.  Evolution of the QPLA	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	34
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	35
A:    Interviewees	
B:    APP Program Application and Sample Instrument	
C:    Guide to University Partner Programs Sample Page	
D:    Leadership Development Seminars/Summer Leadership Conferences List of Topics	
E:    Sample Principal Evaluations	

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mounting evidence indicates that school principals are critical drivers of student success, as principals have an important role in attracting, retaining, and developing effective teachers, as well as establishing a culture that fosters effective teaching<sup>1</sup>. While some districts and states are making strides in improving principal preparation, training once on the job, and providing effective support, very few districts have designed fully integrated and aligned systems that put school leadership at the core of their school improvement efforts.

Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) is an example of a district that is working to create an intentionally systemic school leadership strategy to improve its schools and raise student achievement. This approach to school leadership has garnered national attention. GCPS was chosen as one of the Wallace Foundation's six "Principal Pipeline" districts, which is a \$75 million initiative aimed at improving student achievement through improving schools' pipelines of effective school leaders. GCPS also was a finalist for the 2009 Broad Prize, won the highly prestigious Broad Prize in 2010, and they are co-winners with Orange County Public Schools of the 2014 prize. Most importantly, GCPS students outperform state averages on every metric tracked by the state of Georgia.

CEO/Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks, who has led the district since 1996, has consistently elevated school leadership as a critical component of the district's overall strategy. What makes the Gwinnett story particularly unique is the way the district has messaged the importance of supporting school leaders throughout its culture. GCPS employees understand that their primary responsibility is to improve teaching and learning, which can be achieved by supporting school leaders. The district has dedicated significant staffing and budgetary resources to ensure that leadership development and support remains a top strategic priority over the long run. In turn, GCPS continuously monitors the impact of those investments to ensure that they are having the desired effect on school leader placements, job retention, and impact on student and school performance.

The district also is mindful of the "operating conditions" in which principals work. Superintendent Wilbanks and his team believe that if principals are to be held accountable for school level results, it only makes sense to give them authority over critical decisions, such as the hiring and firing of personnel, budgeting, and the school schedule. The district's Instructional Support Center takes responsibility for handling core and administrative matters, such as data systems, curriculum, assessments, and evaluation processes. With this support structure in place, principals can focus their time on implementing the instructional program to maximize student achievement and success.

<sup>1</sup> (1) Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005). *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. (2) Branch, G. F., Hanushek, E. A., Rivkin, S. G. (2013). School leaders matter: Measuring the impact of effective principals. *Education Next*, 13(1). (3) Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota. Retrieved from: <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/key-research/Documents/Investigating-the-Links-to-Improved-Student-Learning.pdf>

Under Wilbanks' leadership, the district has developed and implemented multiple in-house leadership development programs all under the Quality-Plus Leader Academy (QPLA) umbrella. These are to ensure that GCPS has the talent pipeline needed to fill assistant principal and principal vacancies with well-prepared and effective school leaders. The goal of the Academy is to prepare school leaders to come to the job with substantial training, instructional knowledge, and an understanding of GCPS practices and policies.

Principal support continues on the job. Newly appointed school leaders are paired with mentors for two years. They receive ongoing training from top district leaders, including the superintendent himself. They engage in a number of support networks designed to minimize the isolation of being a principal and improve their performance. Over the last ten years, Gwinnett has implemented a three-pronged approach to school leadership that supports principals in achieving the ambitious goals set for them. Each of these components complements and reinforces one another:

- 1. Make school leadership a core component of the district strategy*
- 2. Create the district conditions that enable effective school leadership*
- 3. Build a complete pipeline to prepare and support effective school leaders*

The existing research on the importance of principals, in addition to leadership work being done in successful districts like Gwinnett County Public Schools, lead us to believe that districts can improve the effectiveness of their school leaders, and their schools, by systematically and strategically making school leadership a priority. This case study highlights the evolution of Gwinnett's approach to doing this important work.

# INTRODUCTION

## Why School Leadership?

There is growing awareness among educators and policymakers that effective school leaders are critical to school success and student achievement. Many studies illustrate the important benefits of effective school leadership for teachers, pointing to the significant influence on teacher satisfaction, development, and retention<sup>2</sup>.

Principals strengthen a school's "professional community – a special environment within which teachers work together to improve their practice and improve student learning." This has a positive impact on teacher satisfaction, teacher development, and student achievement<sup>3</sup>. Principals can build the core skills of their teachers while also creating an environment promoting collaboration where teachers learn from and support one another, greatly enhancing their effectiveness. By working closely with and improving the effectiveness of teachers, principals create a multiplier effect, whereby an effective principal impacts dozens of teachers, who in turn influence hundreds of students<sup>4</sup>.

New research suggests that principals significantly influence the retention of effective teachers and teachers<sup>5</sup> "usually leave for reasons their principal could have controlled<sup>6</sup>." Teacher departures impact student achievement as multiple research studies indicate that average novice teachers become significantly more effective over the first five years of their careers<sup>7</sup>. In addition to negatively affecting student outcomes, teacher turnover also creates a significant financial drain on districts. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future reports that replacing a teacher who leaves an urban school district costs nearly \$9,000 to the district and \$70,000 to the school<sup>8</sup>.

Districts can provide the tools, supports, and organizational culture that enable well-prepared principals to be successful, according to a report released by the Bush Institute and New Leaders<sup>9</sup>. The existing research on the impact of principals, in addition to leadership work being done in districts like Gwinnett County Public Schools that are getting results in student achievement, lead us to believe that districts can and should play an important role in improving the effectiveness of their school leaders and their schools. This can be done by systematically and strategically making school leadership a priority, creating conditions that allow principals to succeed, and developing a strong pipeline (either with external partners or internally).

- 2 (1) Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005). *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. (2) Branch, G. F., Hanushek, E. A., & Rivkin, S. G. (2013). School leaders matter: Measuring the impact of effective principals. *Education Next*, 13(1). (3) Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota. Retrieved from: <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/key-research/Documents/Investigating-the-Links-to-Improved-Student-Learning.pdf>
- 3 Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, University of Minnesota. Retrieved from: <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/key-research/Documents/Investigating-the-Links-to-Improved-Student-Learning.pdf>
- 4 Jerald, C. (2012). *Leading for effective teaching: How school systems can support principal success*. Washington, DC: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
- 5 Pogodzinski, B., Youngs, P., Frank, K. A., & Belman, D. (2012). Administrative climate and novices' intent to remain teaching. *The Elementary School Journal*, 113(2), 252-275.
- 6 TNTP. (2012) *The irreplaceables: Understanding the real retention crisis in America's urban schools*. Brooklyn, NY: Author.
- 7 Atteberry, A., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2013). *Do first impressions matter? Improvement in early career teacher effectiveness*. Washington, DC: The National Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research.
- 8 Carroll, T. (2007). *The high cost of teacher turnover*. Washington, DC: The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.
- 9 Ikemoto, G., Taliaferro, L., Fenton, B., & Davis, J. (2014). *Principals at scale: Creating district conditions that enable all principals to be effective*. Dallas, TX: George W. Bush Institute.



## Gwinnett's Approach to Leadership

Over the last ten years, Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) has created a coherent and aligned approach to developing and supporting effective school leaders. Gwinnett developed its own suite of in-house pipeline programs that train and support school and district leaders throughout their careers. Gwinnett has intentionally made school leadership a central component of its overall strategy and established the conditions to support and empower principals. According to J. Alvin Wilbanks, chief executive officer and superintendent of Gwinnett County Public Schools, *"everything rises and falls on leadership."*<sup>10</sup>

GCPS has devised a three-pronged approach to ensuring that its leadership has the skills, knowledge, authority, and supports needed to drive student achievement results at the school level by:

- *Making School Leadership a Core Component of the District Strategy*
- *Creating the District Conditions that Enable Effective School Leadership*
- *Building a Complete Pipeline to Prepare and Support Effective School Leaders*

*"Everything rises and falls on leadership."*

This case study explores how these three areas intersect and how each is critical to GCPS' approach and success to date. Our hope is that this will serve as a guide for other districts interested in elevating school leadership as a district priority.

### The Gwinnett Context

Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) is the largest school district in Georgia and is estimated to be the 14th largest school system in the country. Located in the metro Atlanta area, GCPS serves an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse population of more than 174,000 students<sup>11</sup>. The district has 134 schools, and the student population continues to grow every year<sup>12</sup>.

The district has been led by CEO/Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks since 1996. Currently, Wilbanks is the longest-tenured urban superintendent in the country, which has given him a unique opportunity to create a system of highly successful schools that deliver impressive student achievement results. GCPS students outperform state averages on every metric tracked by Georgia's Education Scoreboard, a tool that monitors student proficiency. In 2010-11, the most recent year for which data is available, 78% of GCPS 4th graders and 87% of GCPS 7th graders met state standards in each subject tested. Furthermore, 79% of 9th graders were deemed to be "on-track", meaning they met state standards in literature and advanced in grade.

Wilbanks consistently has maintained school leadership as a critical component of the district's overall strategy. Gwinnett County's systemic approach to leadership development has brought national attention to the district. In 2011, the Wallace Foundation launched a \$75 million initiative to help six urban school districts improve student achievement by developing a larger corps of effective school principals, especially for their highest-needs schools. Gwinnett County was named one of Wallace's "Principal Pipeline" districts, selected from more than 90 applicants. The foundation looked for exemplary urban districts that were "well on their way to putting in place the training and support necessary to have enough effective principals for all of their schools"<sup>13</sup>.

10 Wilbanks, J. A. (2013, April 6). Message from the Superintendent on the GCPS Vision for Leadership, Gwinnett County Public Schools [Website Post]. Retrieved from: <http://www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps-mainweb01.nsf/pages/MessagefromtheSuperintendentontheGCPSVisionforLeadership>

11 Gwinnett County Public Schools. (2014, August 26). About GCPS [Website Post]. Retrieved from: <http://publish.gwinnett.k12.ga.us/gcps/home/public/schools>

12 Ibid.

13 The Wallace Foundation. (2013). The Wallace Foundation launches major "Principal Pipeline" Initiative to help school districts build corps of effective school leaders [Press Release]. Retrieved from: <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/view-latest-news/PressRelease/Pages/The-Wallace-Foundation-Launches-Major-Principal-Pipeline-Initiative-to-Help-School-Districts-Build-Corps.aspx>

## “We can’t be an effective district unless we have effective leaders in every school,” says Wilbanks.

The Broad Prize is a prestigious education award given annually to honor urban districts that have made impressive student achievement gains while also reducing the achievement gaps among student subgroups and between low-income and non-low-income students. Districts are chosen as finalists based on publicly

available student data that is reviewed by a panel of education experts and validated in school site visits. The Gwinnett school system was a finalist in 2009, won the award in 2010, and, even more impressive, was a winner again in 2014, along with Orange County Public Schools in Florida.

Prior to becoming Superintendent, Wilbanks served as the first President of Gwinnett Technical College (Gwinnett Tech). While at Gwinnett Tech, he was exposed to the management philosophies of Peter Drucker and W. Edwards Deming.

In particular, Drucker’s and Deming’s emphasis on leadership as a driver of an organization’s results resonated with Wilbanks, and he was convinced of its relevance and potential to improve K-12 education. “I’ve been a fan of Deming and Drucker for quite a while...they teach that you have to see the big picture, be forward looking, and build the capacity of your people. We can’t be an effective district unless we have effective leaders in every school,” says Wilbanks, who is convinced that the key to the success of GCPS’ schools and the district’s overall performance is the quality of school and district leadership.

### School Leadership Approaches Nationally

In our experience, it is rare for a district to approach school leadership systematically and strategically. School districts across the country typically approach developing school leaders in one of three ways.

First, many districts take a passive approach, whereby a district relies on the candidates who come to it—often graduates from nearby schools of education—to fill school leadership positions without actively engaging in strategically building a pipeline of skilled leaders that match the needs of the district. Unfortunately, this approach does not ensure that these school leaders receive comprehensive training and/or support that will enable them to be successful. Nor does it result in a district having the leaders it needs.

The second approach taken by school districts is a more programmatic approach, whereby a district develops future school leaders through a one-time professional development program focused on the transition to becoming a principal. In most circumstances this type of program does not embed the creation of a pipeline of leaders into a comprehensive, coherent school leadership strategy. Often this results in a district having too few leaders able to effectively lead schools.

The third approach is the one most rarely utilized in districts, and it is the approach taken by Gwinnett County Public Schools. This approach is a more intentionally systematic one in which a district develops a pipeline of school leaders through either purposeful partnership with outside preparation organizations and/or internally as part of district-based preparation efforts. This effort is part of a comprehensive, district-level, school leadership strategy, which includes ensuring that the conditions in which school leaders operate are ones that enable their success. Schools that use this approach align standards, development, performance management, and evaluation.

# GCPS' APPROACH TO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW

Gwinnett has taken action in three important and intersecting areas to advance its goal of ensuring an effective school leader is in every school and for every student.

## *1. Make School Leadership a Core Component of the District Strategy*

Under the guidance of CEO/Superintendent Wilbanks, the district has formulated a very clear theory of action: school leadership is an important driver of student success. GCPS' most senior leaders, including the Superintendent, spend significant time and energy creating a culture where all district employees, and particularly central office staff, support the district's school leaders in order to drive student success in Gwinnett.

With dedicated staffing resources and financial support from the district and foundation grants, GCPS has instituted a sustainable approach to developing aspiring, rising, and in-service school leaders. To ensure that these significant investments are paying off, GCPS carefully monitors the impact and results at the school level and uses that information to continuously improve school leadership selection, training, and supports.

## *2. Create the District Conditions that Enable Effective School Leadership*

GCPS has established the conditions to enable school leader effectiveness. To allow principals to focus on teaching and learning, GCPS manages "core" academic functions, including the district's curriculum and interim assessments, and logistical and operational functions. In turn, principals are granted significant autonomies in the use of data, budget, program, schedule, and staffing.

These autonomies are aligned with the district's theory of managed performance/empowerment. That theory holds all schools accountable to the same high standards but empowers principals to determine how they reach those standards.

Additionally, GCPS has instituted a coordinated system of hiring, induction, ongoing training, and support to ensure that the assistant superintendents in the Division of School Improvement and Operations (principal managers) are attuned to principal needs. This also ensures that principals are given the resources and autonomy to drive improvements in teaching and learning in their school buildings. GCPS' rigorous evaluation system ties principal performance to school and student outcomes.

## *3. Build a Complete Pipeline to Prepare and Support Effective School Leaders*

Through its Quality-Plus Leader Academy (QPLA) programs, GCPS develops a ready pipeline of effective educators through multiple programming touch points over the educators' careers. This enables a corps of principals to be developed who possess the knowledge and skills to be successful in positions of school leadership. GCPS customizes the content and format of its leadership programming to fit its context, ensuring that leaders have the capacity to meet the unique needs of its students, families, teachers, and schools.

Prominent among GCPS' leadership programming is its Aspiring Principal Program (APP), which prepares rising principals to lead a school. Over time, GCPS has expanded the QPLA's programming beyond aspiring principals, introducing additional tracks, including the Aspiring Leader Program (ALP), which provides training to GCPS' rising assistant principals, and the District Leader Program (DLP), which builds the capacity of district leaders to support school leaders. The QPLA programs are well integrated and aligned so that aspiring school leaders continually build their skills over the course of their careers.

# MAKE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP A CORE COMPONENT OF DISTRICT STRATEGY

For almost two decades, GCPS has remained consistent in its strategic direction, pursuing a vision of becoming a system of world-class schools. From the beginning of Wilbanks' tenure, school leadership has been central to this work—and it remains so today.

The CEO/Superintendent sets the district's agenda with regard to school leadership and communicates the value GCPS places on school leaders to internal and external audiences. In doing so, he sets the expectation that deep engagement with and support of school leadership is expected of Gwinnett's top central office administrators.

The Gwinnett County Board of Education shares this same vision and plays an important supportive role in the district's approach to school leadership. As Wilbanks and his Cabinet developed the district's approach to prepare and support effective school leaders, called the Quality-Plus Leader Academy (QPLA), they shared their plans with and solicited the input of Board members.

Today, the Board receives regular updates on the QPLA programs and is kept apprised of their impact in developing effective leaders for the district. Wilbanks described the Board's involvement as "extremely important," because "the Board's involvement enables us to do the work we do in school leadership."

The Board's belief in the work also ensures that the district is able to allocate the financial and human capital resources required to support its school leadership work. Dr. Glenn Pethel, Assistant Superintendent of Leadership Development, also observed that Board support for leadership development efforts is critical. "If the superintendent and Board of Education are not committed, it is hard to claim that school leadership is a strategic priority," said Pethel.

The district also has allocated the necessary staffing and financial resources to ensure that leadership development programming is of high quality and sustainable over the long-term.

While the district's top leaders were instrumental in bringing the QPLA to life, GCPS has been extremely effective in building a strong districtwide culture in support of effective school leadership as a means for driving student achievement results. Top central office administrators take responsibility for guiding aspiring principals during their Aspiring Principal Program (APP) training and providing the necessary supports once they assume leadership positions in schools. The district also has allocated the necessary staffing and financial resources to ensure that leadership development programming is of high quality and sustainable over the long-term.

### *Superintendent Tenure*

Undoubtedly, the fact that CEO/Superintendent Wilbanks has been leading GCPS since 1996 has aided his ability to make school leadership one of GCPS' top priorities over the long term.

A long tenured superintendent, however, is not a prerequisite for making school leadership a district priority. In fact, newly appointed superintendents often have great success in reshaping district priorities and strategy as they enter their new roles, as district staff expect some degree of change within the district's priorities.

Newly-appointed superintendents experiencing trouble generating buy-in for school leadership as a district priority can engage long-tenured district staff, asking them to serve as advocates for school leadership – a tactic that can help create momentum for school leadership and buy-in throughout the district.

### Supportive District Culture

Central office staff—across all functional responsibilities and all levels of seniority—view the development and support of school leaders and teachers as a critical part of their roles. A current GCPS assistant principal and past program participant believes that Wilbanks' own personal involvement "speaks volumes about the importance the district places on school leadership." But GCPS' efforts to improve school leadership have been effective largely because they are driven by the district's full set of senior leaders, and not exclusively by the superintendent. The commitment of senior leaders to developing school leaders is demonstrated in many ways. Perhaps the most visible way is their involvement with the QPLA program itself.

This commitment begins at the top. Wilbanks teaches four of the twelve APP training sessions. Members of his Executive Cabinet teach the other eight.

Even when district leaders are not teaching, they are often in attendance. This presence and commitment, beginning with the APP program and continuing through the course of principals' tenure, creates a strong perception among principals that district leaders are always available to provide support and help find solutions to instructional or tactical challenges. A current GCPS principal and graduate of the APP program explained: "The APP very clearly establishes that the district is here to support us, and that we are not alone."

It is well understood that every GCPS employee is expected to support teaching and learning. Pethel described the development of this culture. He commented that district leaders "clearly, consistently, and pervasively" communicate to GCPS' central office staff that their primary responsibility is to improve teaching and learning, which can be achieved by supporting school leaders.

This kind of culture creates a sense of trust and partnership between district and school leaders. Everyone understands that they are working together to improve student achievement.

## Dedicated Staff Resources

To ensure that school leadership receives consistent attention and remains a district focal point over time and through staff transitions, GCPS created specific staff positions devoted exclusively to supporting the Quality-Plus Leader Academy (QPLA). This program houses all of the district's leadership programs.

In addition to their role in developing and running the QPLA's programs, the designation of staff members to the program signals the importance of school leadership. One QPLA staff member noted that this allocation of resources to school leadership is, "ensuring we are matching the walk and the talk." While allocating resources to school leadership can prove difficult—especially in times of economic uncertainty—doing so is a vital step in making school leadership a key part of district strategy.

Pethel and one other part-time GCPS staff member were the only staff dedicated to the QPLA prior to the APP's launch in 2007. After the QPLA's launch, GCPS was successful in securing philanthropic support, which enabled the district to add additional staff over time. Today, the QPLA has 20 staff members, including clerical, administrative personnel, and leader mentors. Leader mentors are retired principals who work part-time to support novice principals and assistant principals.

QPLA staff members are responsible for developing and managing the various programs on a day-to-day basis, working across the district's functional areas. Additionally, they collect feedback from program participants, adapting the course structure and content to better meet the needs of participants in real time. QPLA staff serve as a support system for principals and assistant principals. As school leaders transition into their roles, they often have questions about district policies, procedures, and norms. School leaders view QPLA staff members as a helpful resource to address these questions.

## Dedicated Financial Resources

GCPS allocates financial resources to support the QPLA program. The 2013 budget was more than \$5.5M, with staff salaries (equating to 9 FTE) and release time and replacement staff for the residency component of the APP and ALP programs as the largest line item costs (see Figure 1).

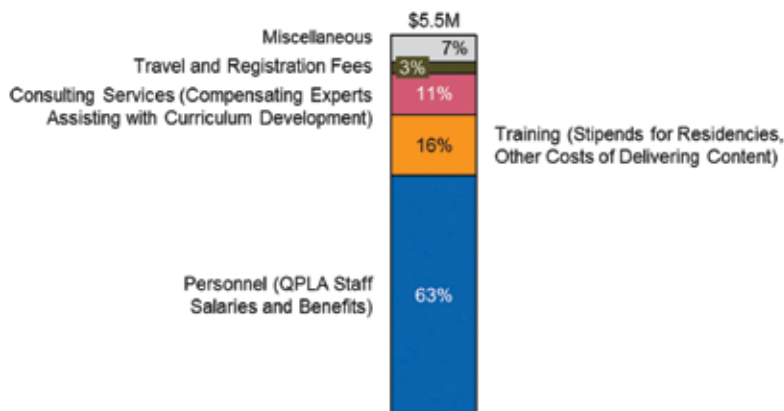


Figure 1: The QPLA's budget by category for 2013. Nearly 80% of the budget is allocated to staff costs and training costs.

The sustained and committed investment in the QPLA is in line with research on the importance of funding efforts to improve school leadership, and it is a driver of the district's success. Research shows that "exemplary principal development initiatives require significant investment of resources."<sup>14</sup>

Gwinnett's success as a district generally, and its commitment to school leadership in particular, has garnered external philanthropic support. Pethel points to the combination of GCPS' investment in leadership and strong early results as critical to the ability to attract funding support from local, national, and federal sources. Since 2008, GCPS has attracted funding from varied sources including the Wallace Foundation, the Broad Foundation, and government programs including Race to the Top.

In 2013, GCPS received \$3M in external funding and allocated \$2.5M in district-provided resources. The full budget of \$5.5M allowed GCPS to train upwards of 70 school leaders through the APP and ALP programs, and provided ongoing support to more than 500 school leaders.

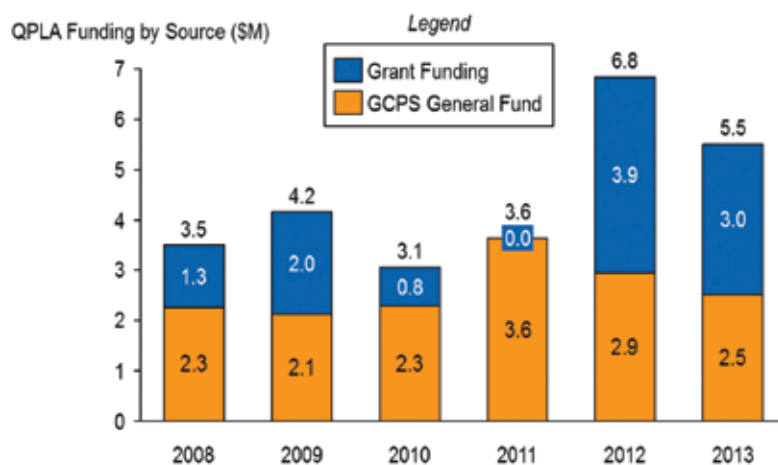


Figure 2: The QPLA's funding by source from 2008-2013. GCPS maintains its funding for the QPLA and adjusts it to mitigate the impact of fluctuations in grant funding.

Although Gwinnett's financial commitment to school leadership is large in absolute terms, the district portion of the investment represented only 0.2% of its 2013 general fund. With this small amount of budgeted money, the district is able to impact thousands of teachers and drive achievement for more than 174,000 students.

<sup>14</sup> Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., & Orr, M.T. (2007). Preparing school leaders for a changing world: lessons from exemplary leadership development programs. Stanford, CA: Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.

The district spent just over \$75,000 per participant in the APP and ALP programs in 2013, including residency costs.<sup>15</sup> This is consistent with—if not less than—school leadership expenditures of leading national programs, with some other district programs spending up to \$100,000 per program participant, not including residency salaries.<sup>16,17</sup>

In all, the district contributed just over \$15.5M to the QPLA program between 2008 and 2013 (see Figure 2). Even if the philanthropic funding wanes, the district remains committed to fully funding its school leadership programs. In years in which philanthropic funding has declined, the district has stepped in to increase its own funding to ensure that the QPLA programs continue to thrive. Dr. Pethel described the balance between district and grant funding as one where “external money helps, but the district must be committed to finding ways around funding barriers.”

As the amount of internal and external funding allocated to the QPLA expands and contracts over time, the QPLA adjusts its offerings to best match its budget. For example, the QPLA’s 2012 and 2013 budgets are significantly larger than those of previous years. The increase enabled the launch of the District Leader Program (DLP) in 2012 and an expansion of the number of participants in the Aspiring Leader Program (ALP) from 36 in 2010 to 54 in 2013.

## CREATE THE DISTRICT CONDITIONS THAT ENABLE EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Not only has Gwinnett made school leadership a district priority and invested in the training and support of school leaders, but it has carefully considered the conditions in which principals work to enable their effectiveness. Do they have the

“There are two kinds of employees in this district – those who teach and those who support those who teach.”

authority to make key decisions for their schools? Do they have the necessary support structures in place at the central office level to allow them to focus on the work of instructional leadership? GCPS has put in place the systems that give their well-prepared school leaders the flexibility to design solutions and structures that fit their school environment.

### Leadership Philosophy

Principals in GCPS are expected to serve first and foremost as instructional leaders and focus intensely on the academic performance of their students. This aligns with the “management by results” approach first popularized by Peter Drucker in his 1954 book, *The Practice of Management*.<sup>18</sup>

Accordingly, school leaders in GCPS spend much of their time supporting teachers in delivering instruction and a smaller amount of their time on building management and administration. GCPS’ off-heard district-wide mantra is: “There are two kinds of employees in this district – those who teach and those who support those who teach.”

GCPS utilizes a distributed, team-oriented approach to school leadership. As Pethel noted: “We don’t believe there is a ‘super-principal.’ Instead, we need our schools to be run by an extraordinary leadership team, not an extraordinary individual.” This team-based approach to leadership has helped ensure that schools remain effective even as they have expanded in size to accommodate the growing student population. With the principal focused on teaching and learning –

<sup>15</sup> This figure likely overestimates the APP and ALP per-participant costs, as it is calculated as (total QPLA budget/total APP and ALP participants). It therefore includes costs associated with the DLP, Summer Leadership Conference, and other QPLA programs in the APP and ALP per-participant costs.

<sup>16</sup> Cheney, G. R., Davis, J., Garrett, K., & Holleran, J. (2010). A new approach to principal preparation: Innovative programs share their practices and lessons learned. Fort Worth, TX: Rainwater Leadership Alliance.

<sup>17</sup> School leaders in Georgia must possess a master’s degree to receive certification, which the QPLA programs do not provide. Costs associated with earning a master’s degree are additive to the QPLA costs and borne by individuals rather than the district.

<sup>18</sup> Drucker, P. (1954). *The Practice of Management*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publisher.



and having a global view of the school to ensure effectiveness across the board – school leadership team members are expected to play significant leadership roles.

GCPS places great value on its assistant principals and teacher leaders, and builds their capacity to contribute to the achievement of students in their school. This perspective is supported by research indicating that collective school leadership has a measurable positive effect on student achievement<sup>19</sup>. Assistant principals take responsibility for closely managing certain areas of the school—for example, a certain grade level or a certain subject spanning all grades at the school.

There is an important distinction between the roles played by principals and assistant principals. The skills required by each role are different: principals must lead to improve effectiveness of all aspects of the school while assistant principals often take day-to-day ownership over one function or area.

Teacher leaders also are of critical importance in GCPS. These positions, which are assigned by the principal, are formal designations that generally acknowledge a teacher as having responsibility over instruction in a particular grade or subject area.

Teacher leaders assist other school leaders and teachers with lesson planning, analyzing and acting on student achievement data, and improving instruction. Teacher leaders serve as a “bridge” between teachers and other school leaders, bringing a practicing teacher’s perspective to discussions among school leaders. This helps school leaders understand the extent to which their ideas for improving student achievement will be implementable at the classroom level.

“I feel empowered to do my job well and to make decisions based on what I know best about the needs of my students, teachers, families, and community.”

By working closely with principals and assistant principals, teacher leaders gain exposure to the practices of leadership. They begin developing these skills to ready them for increased leadership roles.

Research shows that the performance of schools improves measurably when principals are given autonomy over their schools in exchange for accountability for performance and progress. UCLA researcher Dr. William Ouchi studied 442 schools in eight urban districts and found a direct correlation between “how much control a principal has over his or her budget and how much that school’s student performance rises.” According to Ouchi, autonomy and school organization reform “produces a more potent improvement in student performance than any other single factor.”<sup>20</sup>

19 Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, University of Minnesota.

20 Ouchi, W. G. (2009). *The Secret of TSL: The Revolutionary Discovery That Raises School Performance*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

## School Level Autonomy, Rooted in Accountability

In many districts, school leaders are held accountable for the success of their school, but they often are given little say over critical decisions. In contrast, GCPS's theory of managed performance/empowerment holds all schools accountable to the same high standards but provides principals autonomy and flexibility in how they reach those standards.

Those principals who are more successful in reaching the standards and driving school and student-level achievement are granted greater freedom and decision-making authority. "We believe our principals should be given autonomy over who they hire, flexibility with their budget, and their instructional program," said Wilbanks. New principals in Gwinnett participating in a recent focus group overall agreed with the statement: "I feel empowered to do my job well and to make decisions based on what I know best about the needs of my students, teachers, families, and community."

Autonomy	Overview
<b>Data</b>	Principals have the ability to collect, analyze, and act on real-time student data.
<b>Budget</b>	Principals have authority over school level finances, staffing plans, and strategic investments and are able to determine how to best use their funds to meet their students' needs.
<b>Program</b>	Principals choose the instructional techniques and school support services their students need.
<b>Schedule</b>	Principals decide how time is used throughout the day, including learning and planning time, to best meet their students' needs.
<b>Staffing</b>	Principals have the ability to hire, dismiss, evaluate, and observe teachers, and they control the selection of the school level leadership team members.

*School-based budgeting* is one of the most visible examples of the autonomy granted to school leaders in Gwinnett. The school-based budgeting process extends beyond school finances, enabling principals to make decisions regarding financial management, scheduling within the school day, and human capital. For example, one principal in a recent focus group elected to hire fewer third grade teachers (while still remaining within a maximum student-teacher ratio mandated by the district), which freed up resources for staff development in a targeted subject area. Another school leader chose to bring in an additional school counselor instead of a media specialist to meet the needs of the students in his school.

*School level autonomy over schedule and program* is also granted. For instance, a middle school leadership team may choose to add 15 minutes of "targeted" reading comprehension time to the beginning of every class period, while an elementary school may experiment with different classroom configurations and how to use small group and full class activities for maximum value. These school level decisions result in a greater ability to meet the specific needs of students, teachers, and families in particular communities, and ultimately they result in greater achievement in Gwinnett. According to one assistant superintendent, "What we teach [standards and curriculum] is held tight, but how it's taught in the schools is a professional decision left up to principals and teachers."

*School-level autonomy over staffing* is a critical lever driving building-level culture and change. In GCPS, principals have authority over hiring and firing decisions. According to Wilbanks, “If you hold people responsible, they need to make the personnel decisions. If we hired the assistant principals, we couldn’t hold principals accountable for the results. With the flexibility we give, we also give responsibility.”

Such autonomy over hiring and firing is uncommon. According to a recent national study by the American Institute for Research and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, principals feel they lack authority in making personnel decisions.<sup>21</sup>

School-level autonomy works in Gwinnett because of the incredible amount of support and training given to principals. Additionally, as described earlier, newly appointed principals are not left on their own. GCPS provides substantial support from mentors, assistant superintendents, and peer networks, giving principals access to coaching and regular feedback.

### Centralized Management of Core and Administrative Functions

In order to enable school leaders to focus on teaching and learning, the central office’s Instructional Support Center (ISC) takes responsibility for handling instructional core and administrative matters, such as district-level data systems, curriculum, assessments, and evaluation processes. The central office takes a range of things “off the plate” of school leaders – with a high degree of effectiveness and efficiency – to free them up to focus on teaching and learning.

In particular, the district takes responsibility for holding “tightly” onto data systems, curriculum, evaluation, and interim assessments. Wilbanks explained, “I believe the district needs to own the core from the standpoint of what you teach and how you measure it, but we allow flexibility in how the curriculum is taught.”

School leaders are not charged with doing system-level work, but rather, with doing the important school level work. That includes implementing high quality curriculum and interim assessments that are aligned to each other and standards, instead of having to create them afresh, as is the case in some districts.

Gwinnett also provides robust, highly accessible, near real-time data in an effective, integrated data system. This allows principals and school staff to easily pull reports, use databases, and compare performance across a range of peer schools or socioeconomic groups as well.

Many administrative tasks also are handled quickly and efficiently at the district level. For example, while principals set determinations around what positions to hire and which candidates are selected, the district Human Resources division provides assistance with developing a strong and robust candidate pool and doing background and credentials checks. Human Resources provides an effective tracking system for candidate management.

According to Dr. Frances Davis, GCPS’ Associate Superintendent for Human Resources and Talent Management, “It’s our job as a district to bring the systems thinking to our processes. We don’t want to waste principals’ time running background checks; we want to allow principals to focus on teaching and learning in the school.”

21 Adamowski, S., Therriault, S. B., & Cavanna, A. P. (2007). *The autonomy gap: Barriers to effective school leadership*. Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute & American Institutes for Research.

Similarly, GCPS has improved its fulfillment of maintenance requests by creating a district culture where the Division of Facilities and Operations understands the impact it has on schools and school leaders, leading its facilities department to handle requests quickly and efficiently. The central office also sets policies on student discipline and handles all reporting and compliance matters, further freeing up principals' time. Dr. Steve Flynt, GCPS' Chief Strategy and Performance Officer, explained that the central office's role is to "clear the decks" for school leaders, enabling them to allocate their time to matters that drive student achievement and success: "We never want a principal to have to spend his time fighting with central office to get a maintenance request fulfilled. We're here for them."

## Set Clear Expectations for School Leaders

Gwinnett sets clear expectations for school leaders, outlining rigorous requirements about expectations of principals and assistant principals, particularly as it relates to their performance. The district's "Results-Based Evaluation System" measures student performance and ties such performance to principal and school evaluations.

A recent principal focus group revealed a great deal of transparency about what is expected of school leaders—first and foremost, to drive student achievement, as measured by performance on district and state assessments. "It's very clear what we're expected to do. It's about our students and how well they're doing," explained one principal and current APP participant in the focus group.

This setting of clear definitions of the job requirements of principals and assistant principals is aligned with best practices in school leadership pipeline development.<sup>22</sup> The Wallace Foundation's *District Leadership Matters* underscores the importance of creating job descriptions that "clearly spell out what principals need to know and do to drive better instruction" and developing "fair, reliable performance evaluations that hold principals accountable for student progress."<sup>23</sup>

Principal evaluations in Gwinnett in particular have clearly and explicitly stated guidelines for student achievement and are objective and grounded in data. Principals' on-the-ground evaluations are nearly identical to weighted assessments of their schools, with some additional qualitative data—in other words, a principal's success is the success of his or her school. Consistent with Gwinnett's focus on results and assessment, 70% of a principal's evaluation is determined by quantitative student achievement measures.

Evaluations of school leaders are used to inform the professional development provided them. School leaders are given guidance, support, and training in improving student achievement in content areas where they are demonstrated to be less effective, strengthening their overall performance.

Dr. Flynt described the way student performance informs professional development saying, "We help our principals understand (their strengths) and where they need to grow. We bring in coaches and supports to help principals institute effective practices and understand how they can improve achievement in their areas of need." Principal evaluations also play an important role in promotions to district level leadership. Principals who demonstrate success at the school level are more likely to earn opportunities to become district level leaders.

<sup>22</sup> Jerald, C. (2012). *Leading for effective teaching: How school systems can support principal success*. Washington, DC: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

<sup>23</sup> The Wallace Foundation. (2013). *Districts matter: Cultivating the principals urban schools need*. New York, NY: Author.

# BUILD A COMPLETE PIPELINE TO PREPARE AND SUPPORT EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERS

## Forecasting a Need for School Leaders

Every year, Wilbanks' Cabinet meets to look at the projected number of expected principal vacancies for the next five years. In 2004 district leaders projected an unusually high need for school leaders. More than 60 new principals would need to be hired between 2007 and 2010 due to both a spike in the number of principals who were eligible for retirement and an expected continuation of a more than five percent annual student enrollment growth rate (see Figure 3).



## Expected Principal Vacancies 2013-17

### Expected Vacancies Due To Retirement

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total 5 Yr
ES	4	2	1	5	6	18
MS	1	1	1	2	1	6
HS	0	0	0	0	3	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>27</b>

### Total Expected Vacancies

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total 5 Yr
ES	6	6	5	9	10	35
MS	2	2	2	3	2	12
HS	0	1	1	1	4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>54</b>

### Total Pool & Readiness

	Now	Soon	Total
ES	7	6	13
MS	7	2	9
HS	7	3	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>32</b>

### Ready candidate surplus/(deficit) relative to vacancies

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
ES	1	2	-3	-12	-22
MS	5	5	3	0	-3
HS	7	9	8	7	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-6</b>	<b>-22</b>

Figure 3: GCPS expected principal vacancies 2013-2017 broken up by year

Wilbanks knew that, "We couldn't be an effective district unless we had a strong leader in every school." But GCPS had never hired this many principals at once and they felt that placing underprepared principals in these vacancies would hurt student achievement.

### *Addressing the Need for More School Leaders*

The Superintendent took immediate action by bringing Dr. Glenn Pethel out of retirement. Pethel previously had served as the district's Chief Human Resources Officer, and he had other significant leadership experience in other districts as well.

Pethel became the district's Executive Director of Leadership Development, responsible for ensuring that the most well-qualified individuals are recruited, trained, and selected for school and district-level leadership positions.

According to Pethel, "Our honest assessment [at that time] was that the preparation we gave our school leaders wasn't deep enough or wide enough. We saw the iceberg coming. We could have waited to hit it or steered around it."

Wilbanks and Pethel developed a logic model, or theory of change, which was informed by research on best practices in preparing school leaders. They posited that increasing the percentage of school and district level leaders with the right training and supports would lead to statistically significant improvement on measures of student achievement in the long-term.

**"We are investing in school leadership to have a positive impact on students – if we can't show that link, we would be better off doing other things with our resources."**

Pethel noted, "We are investing in school leadership to have a positive impact on students – if we can't show that link, we would be better off doing other things with our resources." In setting a measurable goal, the district would be able to gauge whether its efforts were effective in improving student achievement and make real-time adjustments as needed.

Wilbanks and Pethel determined that the first step to solving the district's pressing school leadership needs was to build a leadership pipeline. The district opted to develop and run its leadership programming in-house. Up until then, GCPS had relied on a mix of university partners to train aspiring principals. GCPS felt this approach would not be effective for what the district needed going forward.

Pethel commented: "It might have been easier at first if we had outsourced the program. But to develop leaders who have the skills, knowledge, and characteristics we desire, we felt we had to be the ones developing the program. We have the best understanding of the caliber of leaders we need here in Gwinnett, both theoretically and practically. We know more about Gwinnett's student needs, budgeting process, and hiring procedures than external parties, and those were the types of things we needed to make sure we had our new principals learn quickly."

In addition, GCPS was interested in taking a practice oriented approach to training – different from what many university training programs at the time were offering. Another key factor to the decision to run the leadership programming in-house was Pethel's belief that Gwinnett had the skills, capabilities, and capacity to design and run such programs.

**Note:** Gwinnett requires a sizeable staff to develop and implement its full suite of in-house leadership programs. A district's core competency should be operating schools. If a district decides to make developing school leaders another core competency, it needs to build the capacity and talent to do so and ensure sufficient staffing.

The district had success in developing and implementing complex new human capital focused programs and initiatives in the past. And with Pethel's experience in the district, he had a deep understanding of GCPS' culture and practices.

Working closely with Wilbanks, Pethel spent much of 2005 and 2006 researching best practices in school leadership and reaching out to other districts with the goal of better understanding and learning from innovative approaches. In the early planning stages CEO/Superintendent Wilbanks realized the importance of stakeholder engagement. He, along with senior staff, met with focus groups of principals, assistant principals, and district office leaders. Wilbanks, Dr. Cindy Loe, Associate Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, and Emmett Lawson, Associate Superintendent for Educational Leadership were seeking input regarding leadership preparation and ongoing support.

The responses from the focus groups were important in helping the leaders determine what a Gwinnett leadership academy should look like and what the curriculum should cover. These meetings provided critical insight into what to focus on and how to organize the academy based on customer input. They also visibly demonstrated the CEO/Superintendent's and senior leaders' commitment in time and attention to ensuring the future academy would be as effective as possible.

The APP was launched in 2007 to prepare high-potential assistant principals to be the next generation of effective GCPS principals. The first cohort included 39 aspiring principals. Over time, Gwinnett positioned the QPLA as part of a broader school leadership strategy, including making leadership a key component of the district's overall work and building conditions for school leaders to be effective.

Gwinnett's decision to develop an internal pipeline ensures that school leaders have substantial training, instructional expertise, and knowledge of GCPS practices and policies. Now in its ninth cohort, the APP academy has trained the leaders of over 80% of GCPS' schools.

Participation in the APP has effectively become a requirement for GCPS' aspiring principals. During a focus group, a current GCPS assistant principal enrolled in the APP remarked: "If you are going to be a principal in Gwinnett, you go through this program."

In fact, since the program's inception, the district has hired only seven principals from outside the district. And even then, the majority of the seven external hires had previous experience as a teacher and/or administrator in GCPS. As a condition of employment, every new principal is required to complete the Aspiring Principal Program regardless of previous experience.

### **The Leadership Development Umbrella: Quality-Plus Leader Academy (QPLA)**

Developing the APP program was just the first step. Wilbanks and Pethel knew that a stand-alone aspiring principals program would not be sufficient to drive student and school outcomes. The district would need to build a more comprehensive system to prepare and support rising and in-service school and district leaders to enable them to excel in their roles. Each of these programs would be operated under the umbrella of the Quality-Plus Leader Academy.

The Quality-Plus Leader Academy is a suite of programs GCPS uses to prepare rising and in-service school and district leaders to excel in their roles. There are two types of programs the QPLA uses: 1) year-long, cohort-based programs, and 2) ongoing training and support.

## Year-long, Cohort-Based Programs

Most prominent among GCPS' leadership preparation programs is the APP program, which prepares rising principals to lead a school and is highly customized to GCPS' needs and context. Over time, however, GCPS has expanded the QPLA's programming to include other year-long, cohort-based programs. The Aspiring Leader Program (ALP) provides training to GCPS' rising assistant principals, and the District Leader Program (DLP) builds the capacity of district leaders to support school leaders.

## Ongoing Training and Support

Ongoing training and support efforts reach a greater number of district staff, but are less intensive in nature than the cohort-based programs. These sessions and supports include the Leadership Development Seminars, the Summer Leadership Conference, and the Leader Mentor initiative. Collectively, they aim to provide a large number of school and district leaders with training on best practices or current trends in education and leadership.

These trainings are complementary to the year-long, cohort-based offerings in that they help the graduates of the APP, ALP, and DLP programs build upon the skills they develop during these more intensive trainings. They also provide timely guidance to school leaders as they enter a new role (see Figure 4).

<b>Cohort-Based Programs</b>	<b>Aspiring Principal Program (APP)</b>	<b>Aspiring Leader Program (ALP)</b>	<b>District Leader Program (DLP)</b>
Year Founded	2007	2010	2012
	The APP is a year-long program designed to prepare current assistant principals to become principals. The program consists of 12 classroom-based sessions and a 90-day, academic-year, residency at a school within the district	The ALP is a year-long program designed to prepare current teachers, instructional coaches, and other academic staff, to become assistant principals. The program consists of 6 classroom-based sessions and a 3-week residency during summer school at a school within the district	The DLP is a year-long program designed to build the capacity of district leaders and strengthen leadership at the district-level. The program consists of 6 classroom-based sessions and web-based modules
<b>Ongoing Training and Support</b>	<b>Leadership Development Seminars</b>	<b>Summer Leadership Conference</b>	<b>Leader Mentor</b>
	Leadership Development Seminars provide opportunities for school leaders to learn about and develop expertise in specific areas of school leadership	The summer leadership conference brings together school and district leaders to discuss and learn about leadership theory and current trends and topics in education	Newly-appointed principals are assigned a former GCPS principal to serve as a formal mentor for their first two years in the principalship

Figure 4: An overview of the QPLA Programs



GCPS is intentionally systemic in building educators’ skills over their entire careers and creating building blocks of knowledge and competencies at each career level that help prepare the educator for the next career level. Rising school leaders build their skills in instruction while serving as teachers, their skills in curriculum and assessment and instructional leadership as teacher leaders, and their administrative skills while serving as an assistant principal.

GCPS ensures that all entrants into the program have gone through the progression of building their skills over a career spanning teaching and emerging leadership positions (see Figure 5). Nearly all program participants have worked in Gwinnett for a substantial time prior to enrolling in the QPLA, ensuring they have been trained and developed as teachers using methods GCPS believes to be effective.

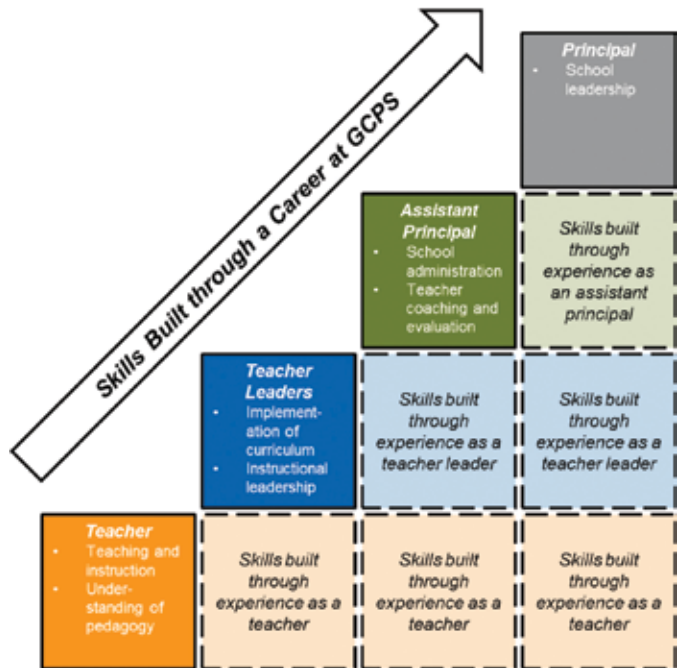


Figure 5: GCPS’ school leaders build their skills over time, as they take on increased responsibility for school leadership. They develop their skills in an additive fashion over the course of their careers.

### Principal Preparation: Aspiring Principal Program (APP)

The first program to be designed under the Quality-Plus Leader Academy was the Aspiring Principal Program (APP). This year-long program is designed to prepare current assistant principals to become principals. GCPS carefully designed the recruitment, selection, and training phases of the APP program in order to ensure a high-quality pool of school leaders would be available to fill projected principal vacancies.

### *Recruitment of High-Potential Principal Candidates*

Wilbanks, Pethel, and the leadership team understood that identifying high-potential school leaders and actively encouraging them to apply for admission to the APP would be a vital first step to the program's success. While any assistant principal in the district is eligible to apply, the district relies heavily on the identification and recruiting efforts of sitting principals who have detailed knowledge of the skills and potential of the members of their school leadership teams.

Because principals in Gwinnett County have first-hand understanding of the qualities needed to be a successful GCPS principal and are themselves effective, they are well-suited for this recruitment role. Principals understand that the recruiting effort is a key function of their job, as is the development of future leaders.

A current APP participant described his experience with this process: "My principal saw my potential and began leading me in the direction of pursuing the principalship." GCPS is creating a more formalized survey process to enable principals to identify effective aspiring principals that may be strong candidates for the program.

### *Selection Process*

While success as a teacher and emerging leader is a requirement of admission, candidates are not selected based on their success in their current or previous roles. Rather, they are selected based on potential to succeed as a principal.

The APP selection process is highly competitive. Through the first seven cohorts of APP applicants, the program received an average of roughly 50 applicants per year and granted admission to roughly half of the applicants. The application itself has three components, each of which assesses a different aspect of the candidate's potential to serve as a principal:

- 1. A recommendation from the principal of the school where the applicant works, which incorporates on-the-job performance and a candidate's potential to serve as a school leader.*
- 2. Performance on the Gallup Principal Insight Tool, which measures a candidate's potential to lead a school based on three dimensions: achievement drive; school structure and planning; and staff, student, and parent/community relationships.*
- 3. Written responses to essay questions, which provide insight into a candidate's motivations for pursuing the principalship, leadership experiences, and written communication skills.*

Pethel and a group of GCPS leaders, including assistant superintendents and members of the Superintendent's Cabinet, evaluate applicant performance in each area. GCPS has the benefit of having a strong in-service pool of principals. Their recommendations, therefore, are considered valuable and they are trusted to weigh in on a candidate's likelihood of becoming a successful principal.

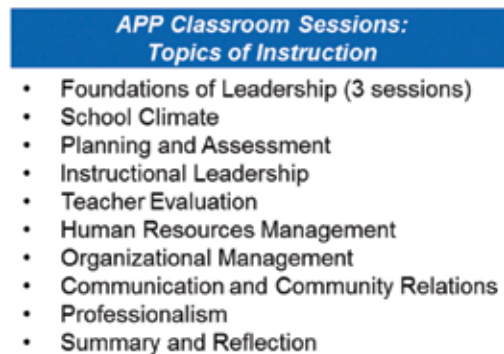
The principal recommendation is weighted as 30% of the applicant's score. The Principal Insight Tool generates a score from 1-99, which is weighted as 40% of the applicant's total score. This tool measures an applicant's talent for the principalship, and it is designed to be predictive of the applicant's ability to lead a highly effective school.

Finally, the applicant’s responses to essay questions are evaluated on a 1-3 scale across eight dimensions, which include, among other things, the candidate’s ability to articulate his or her motivation for pursuing the principalship, evidence that the candidate is ready to assume the position, the candidate’s ability for self-reflection, and the eloquence of the candidate’s writing. An applicant’s score on the essays is weighted as 30% of the total score.

After ranking applications, the group then looks at the demographics and experiences of high-scoring applicants, balancing the incoming APP class to ensure the cohort will meet the district’s projected needs with regard to school level (e.g., high school) and characteristics (e.g., Title I). Wilbanks makes the final selection decisions. (*For additional information on APP application and a sample instrument, please see Appendix B.*)

### *Training Sequence and Residency Component*

The APP training sequence consists of 12 classroom-based, daylong sessions, which span an academic year. With the exception of three sessions on leadership and a concluding session, the classroom sessions map to Georgia’s eight standards for school leadership.<sup>24</sup> The focus is on developing core leadership skills, such as human resources and organizational management (see Figure 6).

- 
- APP Classroom Sessions:  
Topics of Instruction**
- **Foundations of Leadership (3 sessions)**
  - **School Climate**
  - **Planning and Assessment**
  - **Instructional Leadership**
  - **Teacher Evaluation**
  - **Human Resources Management**
  - **Organizational Management**
  - **Communication and Community Relations**
  - **Professionalism**
  - **Summary and Reflection**

*Figure 6: Topics of instruction for each of the 12 APP classroom sessions*

Because GCPS’ rising school leaders are adding to their suite of skills throughout their career, it is expected that they build their skills in instruction while working in the classroom; their skills in curriculum and assessment and instructional leadership as teacher leaders; and their school administrative skills as assistant principals. Thus, the APP curriculum can focus more on management and leadership skills than instructional topics as it is assumed these were developed in the prerequisite positions.

A former GCPS principal now working in the district’s central office noted that “all of the (people) entering the QPLA were strong teachers.”

The curriculum emphasizes GCPS’ specific policies, practices, and procedures necessary for the principalship. Because instruction is delivered directly by Wilbanks and members of the Executive Cabinet, discussions center on challenges and issues relevant to Gwinnett’s context rather than presenting the material generically.

24 Georgia Department of Education (2011, April 13). Leader keys: A leadership evaluation system. Atlanta, GA: Author.

For example, an APP session on school climate may include an in-depth discussion of GCPS' ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. It also may include how principals must take these factors into account when developing a strategy for strengthening school climate.

APP classroom sessions use a variety of methods of instruction including lectures, panel discussions, performance-based team activities, and case studies. Generally speaking, the sessions begin with a review of assigned readings and a lecture format, before shifting to discussion of a case study, a simulation, or other activity incorporating experiential learning. Pethel noted: "We knew that to engage our aspiring principals and bring in the best of adult learning theory, we had to use multiple instructional methods, including many forms of experiential learning."

The APP program is always evolving as Wilbanks, Pethel and the leadership team find ways to improve the experience of the aspiring leaders. Pethel noted that at the beginning, "we didn't have all of the pieces we wanted in place, but we started anyway, knowing we could add as we went."

Every year, Wilbanks meets with APP participants to get feedback on their experiences and to hear any suggestions for potential modifications to the program. GCPS also monitors leaders' performance once on the job and uses that information to strengthen its training and support components.

For example, GCPS has made the program more interactive with additional group work, panel discussions, and case studies relevant to the GCPS context. A residency component was added to the program in 2009 to make it more effective at readying educators for the complex job of the principalship.

With the current APP cohort, the program has also expanded into e-learning. Participants can review the course content online and engage in discussion with their cohort peers through online collaboration and messaging. This change was instituted in support of the district's eCLASS initiative, which aims to strengthen the district's use of technology in teaching and learning. By exposing rising principals to online learning, the APP will improve their ability to support teachers in using web-based tools.

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## THE ADDITION OF THE RESIDENCY

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In 2009, a clinical experience residency was added to the Aspiring Principal Program to increase the readiness of leaders for the principalship. This component is supported by external research<sup>25</sup> and feedback from district leaders, assistant superintendents, principal mentors, and program graduates who all agreed that deeper experiential learning opportunities would help GCPS aspiring leaders link the theory they were learning in classroom sessions with the practice of serving as a principal.

During the residency, APP participants temporarily leave their current assistant principals positions to serve as residents at different schools. Residents are purposefully placed at schools where the principal has knowledge and expertise in areas where the resident needs additional practice and support. The residency gives program participants experience serving in different types of schools and enables participants to focus on building their skills. As one participant noted, “Being removed from my day-to-day responsibilities really helped me focus on learning.” At the conclusion of the residency, the resident completes a reflection, summarizing the experience, learnings, and application to his or her practice as a school leader going forward.

GCPS initially added two 25-day residencies, giving residents the chance to see how two different schools were run and to develop relationships with two in-service GCPS principals. This was later changed to one 90-day residency at the suggestion of Dr. Max Skidmore, a Professor of Education at the University of Georgia and the program’s external evaluator. He explained that his survey analysis of APP principals indicated that a 90-day residency would allow “APP participants to really get into the school and take a hold of something,” authentically practicing their leadership skills rather than just shadowing a principal.

This residency model also gives APP participants a chance to apply the lessons they learn in their coursework with real students and teachers. A current GCPS principal commented that his residency experience was “invaluable to my success as a principal” because it helped him understand what it would be like to come into a new school and begin as a principal. APP participants highly value the relationships they create through their residency. One GCPS principal described her residency principal as a “lifelong mentor.”

<sup>25</sup> For example: (1) Huang, T., Beachum, F.D., White, G.P., Kaimal, G., FitzGerald, A.M., & Reed, P. (2012). Preparing urban school leaders: What works? *Planning and Changing*, 43(1/2), 72-95. (2) Cunningham, W.G. & Sherman, W.H. (2008). Effective internships: Building bridges between theory and practice. *The Educational Forum*, 72, 308-318. (3) Clayton, J. K. (2012). Aspiring educational leaders and the internship voices from the field. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*, 15(3), 367-380.

## Graduate Readiness

The APP program does not grant academic degrees or school leader certification. Wilbanks, Pethel, and the leadership development team determined that “a hands-on experience designed by the district would do more to improve performance than an academic degree. Teachers transitioning to school leadership seldom face difficulty earning certification, as the majority of them already have a master’s degree.” For those who want to pursue an additional credential, GCPS has created a *Guide to University Partner Programs* synthesizing critical information about graduate education programs, including admissions requirements, costs, and instructional methods used. (For a sample page from the “*Guide to University Partner Programs*,” please see Appendix C.)

## Emerging Leader Preparation: Aspiring Leader Program (ALP)

GCPS launched the Aspiring Leader Program (ALP) in 2010 to prepare teachers and other instructional leaders (e.g., instructional coaches) for the transition to assistant principal or other school leadership positions before the principalship. The ALP is a year-long program comprised of six classroom-based sessions, using a variety of instructional methods including case studies, panel discussions, lectures, performance-based team activities, and role playing activities. ALP participants remain in their current positions while completing the coursework. This is followed by a three-week residency as an assistant principal or instructional leader during summer school.

Much like the APP program, the ALP was developed to ensure that GCPS has enough well-trained assistant principals available to fill vacancies. The support of the CEO/Superintendent and the Gwinnett County Board of Education was critical to the development of this new program. Pethel says that they wanted to “control the pipeline of assistant principals rather than hoping the right numbers would show up.”

The ALP helps the district begin developing school leaders earlier in their careers—when they are classroom teachers. Particularly given the district’s large average school size, the need for effective, distributed school leadership teams that take on a variety of roles—from instruction to discipline to scheduling—became even more pressing. This preparation also further strengthens the district’s pipeline of principals, as it helps build a pool of highly-qualified school leaders.

As with the APP, program participants derive much of the value of the ALP from the networks they build with district staff and other members of their cohort. A current participant in the ALP noted that “they are proactive about giving us help and making it clear that they want to help us as we transition to new roles,” while another mentioned that she felt “comfortable picking up the phone and reaching out to the district staff” for advice and guidance.

## District Leader Program (DLP)

The newest addition to the QPLA is the District Leader Program (DLP), which launched in 2012-13. The DLP seeks to build the skills and capacity of district-level leaders to work with school principals to achieve their school leadership goals and improve school performance. DLP plays an important role in building district level leaders who understand the importance of school leadership and are capable supporters of school leaders. GCPS found that those transitioning into district leadership roles often had varying backgrounds and professional experiences and some were better able to support school leaders than others. The DLP curriculum is designed to give all district leaders the knowledge and skills they need to meet the expectations of the job. Session topics include:

- *Establishing goals for achievement and instruction*
- *Monitoring achievement and instruction goals*
- *Allocating resources to support achievement and instruction*

The three QPLA programs (APP, ALP, and DLP) are designed to work together to improve the district’s leadership capacity. Together, the ALP and APP pathways provide a way for teachers into instructional leadership, first as assistant principals, and eventually into principal positions. The DLP is designed to help effective individuals transition to district level leadership, supporting school leaders and enhancing their effectiveness.

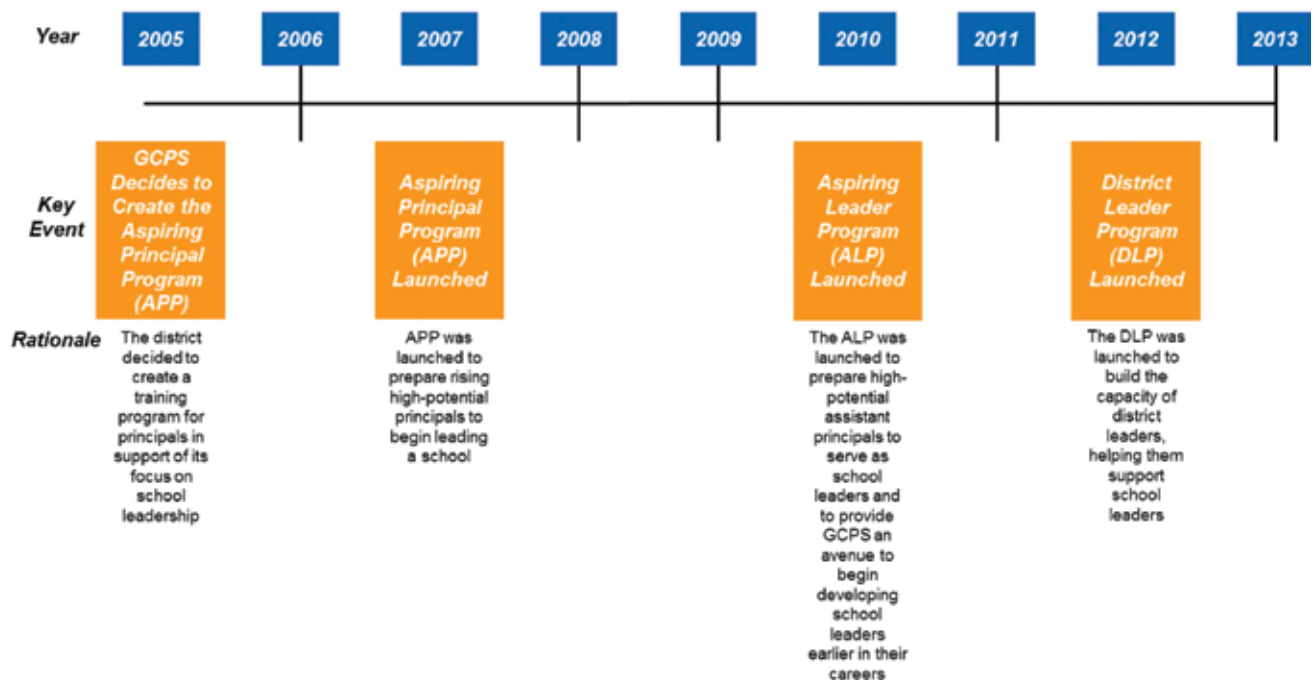


Figure 7: Timeline on launch of each QPLA program

## Principal Support On the Job: Ongoing Training and Support

Each of the QPLA programs begin with cohort-based training, followed by ongoing training and support on the job. GCPS has aligned its systems of hiring, supporting, developing, and evaluating its school and district leaders, as described in the sections below (see Figure 8).

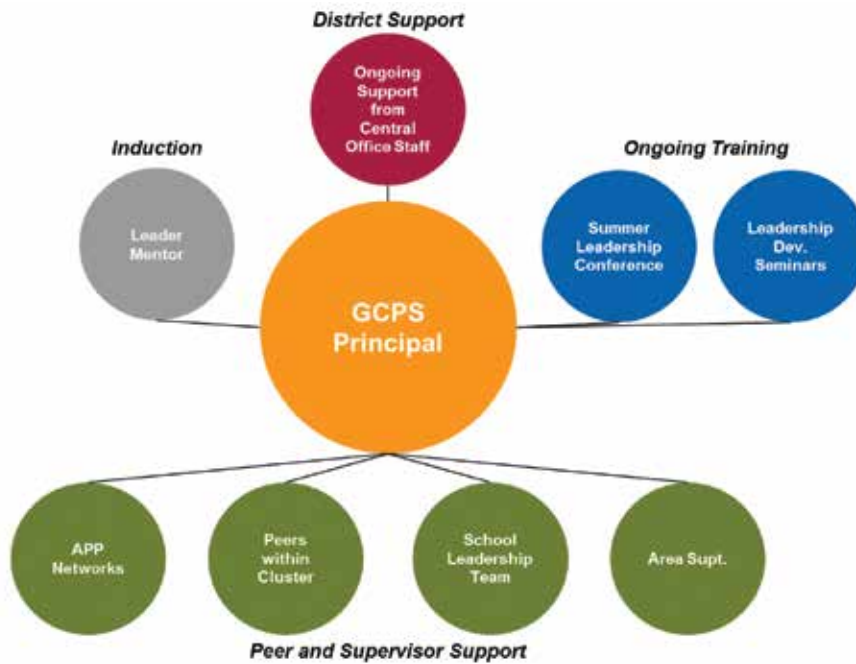


Figure 8: Forms of support provided to GCPS principals

### Hiring and Placement

GCPS fills principal vacancies by hiring graduates and current members of the APP cohort. GCPS considers whether the experiences and skills of a prospective principal will enable him or her to be successful at a particular school (i.e., taking into account the level of school, student demographics, and community characteristics of the school or schools in which a rising principal has worked).

If aspiring leaders are expected to move to a very different kind of school, the residency component of the APP often serves as a “bridge” experience. For example, a current principal at a GCPS school explained that he had strong skills and knowledge working at schools in affluent areas, but that his residency “was completed at a Title I school...which prepared me to more effectively serve in my current role” as the principal of a socioeconomically disadvantaged school.

The district’s most senior leaders, including assistant superintendents, are responsible for making hiring and school match decisions. Because district leaders are so involved in the delivery of APP training sessions, they have had plenty of opportunities to see prospective principals in action and are very familiar with their skills and dispositions.

A current GCPS principal notes that, “The APP is like one long job interview...our district leaders get to know us much more deeply than they could through a typical application process.” Finalists meet with Superintendent Wilbanks, who holds ultimate responsibility for placing principals (subject to approval by the Gwinnett County Board of Education).



## *Induction*

Principals are assigned a mentor during their first two years on the job. The mentors are all retired, successful Gwinnett County principals. They are particularly helpful to new principals because they bring deep knowledge of best practices and experience with GCPS specific policies and procedures. Mentors are there to help principals strengthen their skills and stay focused on school and student achievement goals. Principals place particular value on their relationships with their mentors because the conversations are confidential and non-evaluative.

The goal is to build school leader independence; therefore, as principals gain experience in their role, their mentors step away. Whereas mentors might speak with newly placed principals every other week (in addition to providing guidance on an as-needed basis), a mentor described her engagement with more experienced principals as similar to “10,000 mile checkups.” Yet, even at the conclusion of the formal two-year mentorship, principals may continue to seek guidance from their mentors when they face new or difficult situations.

## *Ongoing Training*

GCPS’ principals also participate in several Leadership Development Seminars each year. These seminars highlight best practices in school leadership. Topics vary but may include guidance on how to be an instructional leader, how to work with teachers to tailor instruction based on student data, or how to effectively supervise and evaluate teachers to ensure that they grow and develop over time.

GCPS’ annual Summer Leadership Conference gives principals an opportunity to come together for an intensive three-day learning experience. This leadership learning and development opportunity has been an annual staple for 37 years - a remarkable fact. The presentations and discussions help principals to stay abreast of current trends and the leader role in implementing the latest reforms in education. A GCPS assistant principal described the value of these trainings, saying, “The continuous communication and learning about leadership is a key driver of our effectiveness.” (A sample list of topics presented at recent Leadership Development Seminars and Summer Leadership Conferences can be found in Appendix D.)

## *Peer and Supervisor Support*

Based on research, GCPS has made the development of peer networks and mentor/mentee relationships a critical part of its work to improve principal performance. Researchers from the University of Washington note the importance of peers and supervisors in shaping performance. “Modeling or demonstrating particular ways of thinking and acting are essential strategies for helping people change their work practices.”<sup>26</sup>

Much of the support principals receive comes from the relationships they build during the APP program. Participants form strong bonds with their cohort peers and district leaders. Once appointed principal, APP alumni often turn to these networks to share their experiences and get feedback and advice when facing challenges. A newly-appointed principal and APP graduate described reaching out to members of her cohort, saying: “Our experiences are all a little bit different, so there is always something you can learn...I can reach out to anyone in my cohort and know they are going to be valuable to speak with.”

School leaders also are informally supported by a network of their peers within their “cluster” of schools. A cluster includes one high school and its middle and elementary feeder schools. These schools draw students from the same neighborhoods, making them very likely to have similar demographics and levels of achievement.

26 Honig, M. I., Copland, M. A., Rainey, L., Lorton, J. A., & Newton, M. (2010). Central office transformation for district-wide teaching and learning improvement. Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

School leaders and assistant superintendents come together for formal cluster meetings to coordinate their curricula across grade levels to ensure vertical alignment and discuss common challenges. A GCPS middle school assistant principal described these conversations as valuable, saying, “We align with the elementary schools in our cluster, which helps us understand the abilities of the students who will be coming to our campus. We then modify our approach to ensure we are meeting our incoming students’ needs.”

Finally, GCPS assistant superintendents in the Division of School Improvement and Operations are key to ensuring that the components of the principal pipeline remain aligned with one another to ensure the effectiveness of GCPS school leaders. They directly supervise the principals, and they are vital to guiding and leading school leaders. They play a role at various points in the process; identifying candidates with potential to excel as a principal; leading relevant trainings; and providing coaching and guidance to help principals improve their performance.

These assistant superintendents serve by level (e.g., elementary, middle, and high school). GCPS has hired additional assistant superintendents in order to reduce the caseload for each supervisor. The current caseload for each assistant superintendent ranges from 10 to 19 principals per supervisor. The average span of control for elementary supervisors is 1:17; middle school is 1:16, and high school is 1:11.

Assistant Superintendents provide real-time coaching and practical guidance based on their own experiences as highly-effective school leaders within the district. One assistant superintendent described the support she provides. “I’m visiting every school at least once a month. My job is to make sure the principal doesn’t falter as he or she becomes acclimated to the role.”

Assistant superintendents also help school leaders engage with central office staff. A GCPS assistant superintendent explained, “We open doors at the central office for our school leaders, and provide district level context to them when they engage with the central office.”

### *Evaluation*

Gwinnett sets clear, rigorous performance expectations for its principals and assistant principals. Under the district’s “Results-Based Evaluation System,” student achievement results make up 70% of a principal’s evaluation.<sup>27</sup>

This approach firmly communicates the importance GCPS places on student learning and incentivizes principals to focus their efforts on improving instruction and student outcomes. The remaining 30% of a principal’s evaluation includes an assistant superintendent’s assessment of a school’s progress in improving student achievement, parent and staff satisfaction, and school management. A GCPS assistant superintendent praised the principal evaluation system, noting it is “highly effective in driving results.” (For a sample principal evaluation, please see Appendix E.)

The performance of schools and school leaders is used to inform professional development from the district. Dr. Flynt says, “We help our principals understand [their strengths] and where they need to grow. We bring in coaches and supports to help principals institute effective practices and understand how, by bolstering their skills, they can improve student achievement.”

<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that school leader evaluations are not based on raw test scores, but rather, scores that are normalized by GCPS’ Department of Research and Evaluation, taking into account many factors, including the demographics of the school. This approach encourages principals, regardless of current school performance, to drive improvement.

## Measuring the Effectiveness of the QPLA

Since the beginning when Wilbanks and Pethel laid out the theory of action linking systemic leadership investments and improved student achievement, GCPS has committed to measuring the results of its QPLA programs. Data is regularly collected and reviewed by both GCPS and an external evaluator on measures such as hiring rates, job preparedness and retention, and impact on teaching and learning.

### School Leadership Preparedness and Job Retention

Importantly, 311 principals and assistant principals have been appointed since the beginning of the QPLA program in 2007, enabling GCPS to meet its leadership needs during a period of rapid growth in student enrollment. GCPS' goals for the QPLA program are as follows:

- *Goal #1: 70% or more of APP graduates will be appointed as principals within three years of completing the program,*
- *Goal #2: 100% of program graduates appointed to the principalship will remain for a minimum of two years.*

Every program graduate appointed as a principal since 2010 was still serving in the role for the 2012-2013 school year. And, on average, APP graduates remain in the principalship for eight years.

During the 2013-2014 school year, 46 out of the 49 graduates were still servicing as principals, and three of the graduates had retired from the school district. Dr. Steve Flynt, GCPS' Chief Strategy and Performance Officer explained the process for placing APP graduates, saying that the district "puts a lot of thought into matching the right principal with the right school"—a major reason for the district's success in school leadership tenure.

Since the QPLA's inception, GCPS has worked with a team of evaluators from the University of Georgia that conducts annual evaluations. These evaluations, which are made available to external funders of the QPLA and are used by GCPS to improve the program, indicate that program graduates find the QPLA to be an effective preparation program.

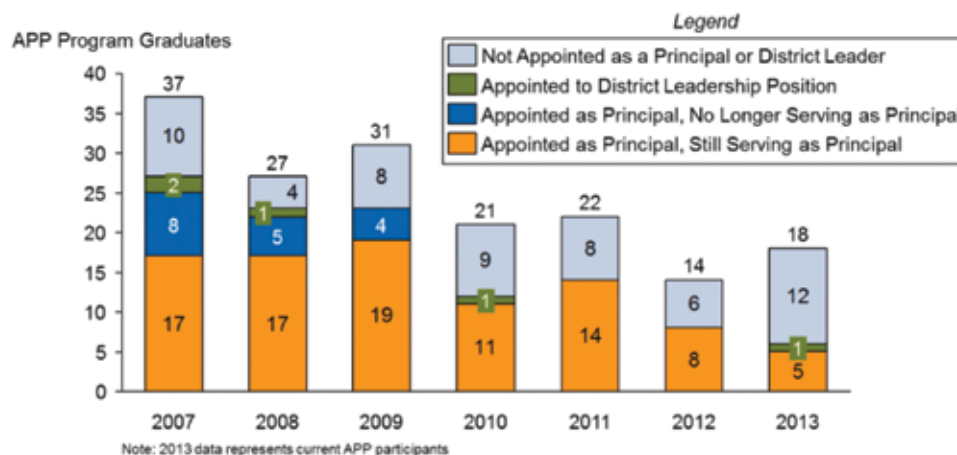


Figure 9: Size of APP class and placement of APP graduates since 2007

The most recent assessment surveyed APP graduates that had been placed as principals one year after their placement, asking how effectively the program prepared them to serve as a principal, across 26 functions of school leadership. In aggregate, program graduates felt “well prepared” or “very well prepared” to serve as a principal in almost 90% of these functions (see Figure 10). The promising internal and external evaluations of the QPLA validate the QPLA’s theory of change and make the case for the continued allocation of significant district time and resources to school leadership.

External evaluations have also confirmed that teachers in schools led by APP graduates “believe their schools are led by effective principals” who are especially “well-prepared in instruction, curriculum, [and] management.”<sup>28</sup> To more comprehensively measure teacher satisfaction with graduates of the APP and assess the extent to which the APP helps build teacher engagement, GCPS is making plans to use the Gallup Q12 Employee Engagement Survey.

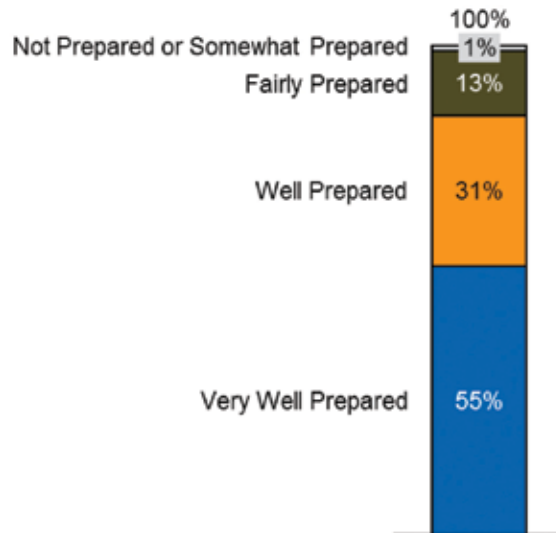


Figure 10: 2010 APP Graduate responses to how well-prepared they felt by the APP to lead their schools across 26 dimensions of school leadership

28 Dr. Max Skidmore, Khalil Dirani, and Melissa Freeman, “GCPS: 2012 APP Assessment,” (Internal GCPS Document, 2013).

## Student Achievement

In 2009, GCPS conducted a preliminary evaluation of the QPLA's impact on student achievement. This evaluation measured student achievement gains in the 30 elementary and middle schools led by members of the first two (2007 and 2008) APP cohorts against student gains in all other district elementary and middle schools.

The evaluation suggested that students at schools with a QPLA graduate principal performed better on Georgia state tests in both math and science than students at schools without.<sup>29</sup> Although this evaluation does not establish a direct link between the QPLA and student achievement, it provided an early indication of the program's success. GCPS continues to seek additional evidence to support this early indication.

## Evolution of the QPLA

Additional QPLA programs have been developed over time to build a more comprehensive approach to school leadership programming. The leadership programming is highly specific to the district's own context and needs, and it has been updated and changed over the years as part of a larger continuous improvement effort (see Figure 11).

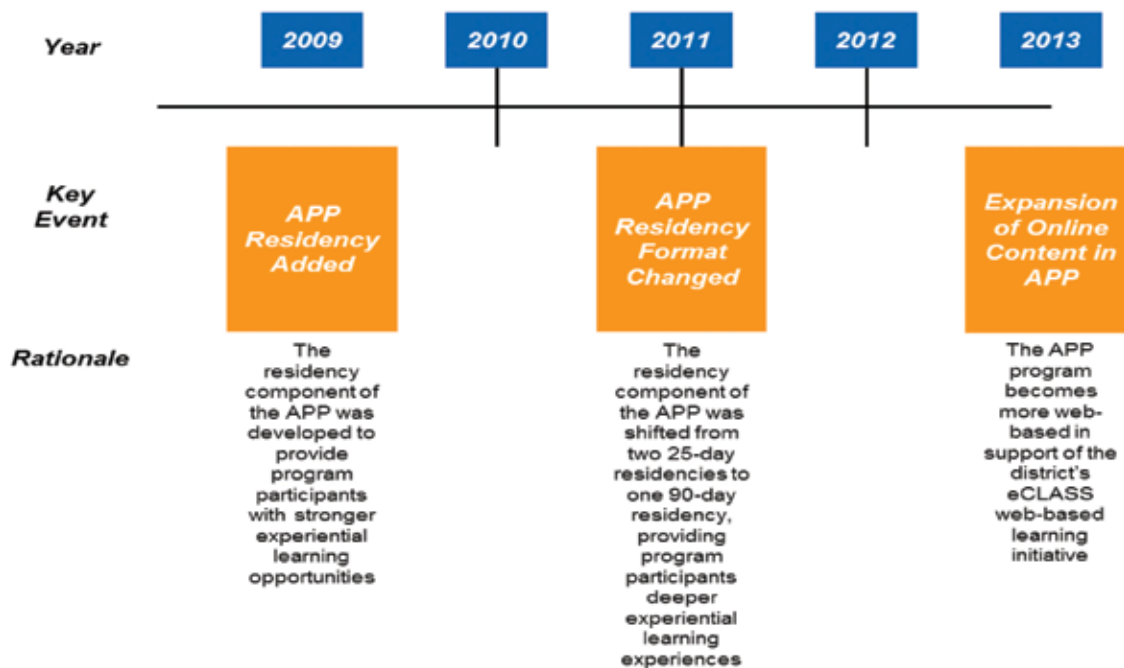


Figure 11: A timeline of the addition of QPLA programs and key changes to the APP

29 Gwinnett County Public Schools, "QPLA Effects on Student Achievement Gains: A Preliminary Causal-Comparative Study," (Internal GCPS document, 2009).

## CONCLUSION

There is a growing body of research showing that school leaders are critical to school success and student achievement. More policymakers are beginning to understand the link between effective school leadership and student achievement.

Indeed, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement notice inviting applications for the School Leadership Grant Program in 2010, declared: "Principals are a major driver of school improvement and teacher quality, and second only to teachers in their impact on student achievement. A strong principal can have a positive impact on teachers' instructional practice, and on the learning outcomes of hundreds of students."<sup>30</sup>

The stakes are high, particularly as states and districts roll out new evaluation models and Common Core curriculum. The principalship is complex work and districts must do more than place talented principals in schools. It requires a commitment from the Superintendent on down through the central office ranks to support and empower school leaders.

Yet school leadership approaches like those taken by Gwinnett County Public Schools—long-term, intentional, holistic, and embedded in district strategy—are rare. Too few districts strategically invest in school leadership and establish the conditions needed for well-trained principals to effectively lead change. Gwinnett's three-pronged approach to school leadership is relevant for districts around the country. To support school leaders in achieving the ambitious goals the district sets for them, GCPS uses three reinforcing and intersecting school leadership components:

- 1. Make school leadership a core component of the district strategy*
- 2. Create the district conditions that enable effective school leadership*
- 3. Build a complete pipeline to prepare and support effective school leaders*

More research is required to fully establish the link between the specific steps taken by districts like Gwinnett to promote leadership and student achievement improvements as measured by standardized tests. There are, however, promising approaches emerging in Gwinnett County.

The practices and recommendations outlined in this case study provide a starting point for districts interested in making school leadership a top strategic priority and a key lever to their reform efforts. Such systemic investment in school leadership—financial, time, and strategic—is a critical lever for districts to meet today's unprecedented challenges in school improvement and student achievement.

<sup>30</sup> Leithwood, K., Louis, K.S., Anderson, S., & Whalstrom, K. (2004). How leadership influences student learning. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, University of Minnesota.

# APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWEES

Interviews with the following people contributed to the development of this case study and implementation guide. The authors extend their deepest gratitude to each interviewee and to Gwinnett County Public Schools for granting access to their district and school leaders.

## Gwinnett County Public Schools

### Quality-Plus Leader Academy Staff

- Erin Hahn, Coordinator, Leadership Development
- Kerry McArdle, Director, Leadership Development
- Dr. Glenn Pethel, Executive Director of Leadership Development
- Kendra Washington-Bass, Director, Leadership Development

### District Leaders

- Jackie Beasley, Mentor and Coach to GCPS Principals
- Dr. Frances Davis, Chief Human Resources Officer
- Dr. Steve Flynt, Associate Superintendent, School Leadership and Operations
- Dr. Gale Hey, Associate Superintendent, Teaching and Learning
- Nancy Martin, Area Superintendent
- Berney Kirkland, Chief of Staff, Superintendent/CEO
- J. Alvin Wilbanks, Superintendent/CEO

### Aspiring Principal Program (APP) Graduates

- Dr. Vince Botta, HR Staffing Director
- Dr. Jeff Matthews, Principal, Gwinnett School of Mathematics, Science, and Technology
- Kim McDermon, HR Staffing Director
- Deborah Scott, Principal, Kanoheda Elementary School
- Dr. Kimberly Smith, Director, Health and Social Services
- Angie Wright, Principal, Craig Elementary School

### Current Aspiring Principal Program (APP) Participants

- Clifton Alexander, Principal, Simonton Elementary School
- Ben Pope, Assistant Principal, Hull Middle School
- Daniel Skelton, Assistant Principal, McConnell Middle School
- Dr. Michele Smith, Principal, Suwanee Elementary School
- Ruth Westbrooks, Principal, Puckett's Mill Elementary School
- Carrie Yougel, Assistant Principal, Harris Elementary School

### Current Aspiring Leader Program (ALP) Participants

- Lydia Bowden, Language Arts Instructional Coach
- Katie Sample, Literacy Coach, Simonton Elementary School
- Jay Nebel, Teacher, Norcross High School
- Katharine Page, Assistant Principal, Shiloh Elementary School

### Parsons Elementary School Staff

- Trisha Baughman, Teacher
- Joyce Bowens, Teacher
- Renee Henderson, Teacher
- Dr. Charlotte Sadler, Principal
- Cara Steed, Assistant Principal
- Karen Williams, Teacher

### Moore Middle School Staff

- Jennifer Clarke, Teacher
- Allen Craine, Assistant Principal
- Johnetta Henry, Teacher
- Lamont Mays, Principal
- Chasiree Stone, Teacher
- Kanika Thomas, Teacher

### Quality-Plus Leader Academy (QPLA) Evaluator

- Dr. Max Skidmore, Academic Professional, Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy, the University of Georgia



# APPENDIX B: APP APPLICATION AND SAMPLE INSTRUMENT



## Aspiring Principal Program Information for Cohort 7 Applicants

### APP Fast Facts

- **Established: 2007**
- **Graduates: 138**
- **GCPS schools led by APP graduates: 85**
- **Students impacted: 162,000+ each year**

### The Importance

Effective principals are second only to effective teachers in impact on student achievement. Selecting and developing strong school leaders is critical to achieving GCPS' mission of becoming a system of world-class schools.

### The Need In GCPS

GCPS placed 19 new principals in 2011-12 and has a continuous need for new leaders as enrollment grows and current principals retire or move on to other leadership positions in the district.

### The Program

The Aspiring Principal Program prepares prospective GCPS principals to be effective instructional and operational school leaders, with a curriculum spanning:

- Foundations of Leadership
- Human Resources and Organizational Management
- Instructional Leadership and Teacher Evaluation
- Communication and Community Relations
- Finance and Budgeting
- Planning and Assessment

The Gwinnett County Public Schools Aspiring Principal Program (APP) is a selective and rigorous institute that equips high-potential assistant principals with the skills and knowledge they need to increase student achievement as the next generation of GCPS principals. Emerging leaders accepted into APP participate in a yearlong academy aligned to the core competencies needed to succeed in the principalship, as well as a 90-day residency that enables them to apply their learning in a real-world setting with the support of a mentor principal. Senior district leaders teach classes. The sessions stress practical application of concepts through case studies from education and other sectors, performance-based team work, and interactive panels with school leaders.

### Criteria

Admission to the program is competitive. Successful candidates will:

- Be a current assistant principal, with at least two years of experience as an assistant principal;
- Possess the motivation, skills, and knowledge to move into the principal role within one to three years;
- Have a strong track record of past performance and progressive leadership responsibility, including demonstrated success as a teacher and leader;
- Be strongly recommended by their supervisors, and have high levels of credibility in their school community.

Cohort members will be expected to commit fully to all components of APP, including high engagement and participation in all class sessions and successful completion of both individual and collaborative assignments as well as an APP residency. Successful applicants will attend a mandatory full-day orientation on September 10, 2012. The full class schedule and other key dates will be communicated upon acceptance. Professional Learning Units (PLU) will be awarded to APP graduates. Participants will continue to earn their salary during residency, but will not receive additional stipends for APP participation. While APP is the strongly preferred pipeline to the principalship within GCPS, administrative placement is not guaranteed.



# Aspiring Principal Program Cohort 7

## Application Part 1: Candidate Information

Completed applications must be submitted via email no later than 5pm EST on August 3, 2012 to:  
 Quality\_Plus\_Leader\_Academy@gwinnett.k12.ga.us

A complete application includes:

- This information form and essays on next pages, completed and submitted by applicant.
- Reference form, completed and submitted directly by supervisor.

It is strongly recommended that applicants communicate their intent to apply by July 23, 2012. Please submit an email to Quality\_Plus\_Leader\_Academy@gwinnett.k12.ga.us with "Intent to apply: APP Cohort 7" in the subject line; no text or attachments are necessary.

Applicant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Position and Work Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Total years in education (do not include 2012-2013 school year): \_\_\_\_\_

Total years as AP (do not include 2012-2013 school year): \_\_\_\_\_

Current Certification Level: \_\_\_\_\_

**EDUCATION**

College/University	Year	Degree
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**WORK EXPERIENCE**

Location	Position	From/To	Total # of Years
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____



## Aspiring Principal Program Cohort 7 Application Part 2: Essay Questions

*Please answer both of the following questions, using no more than 500 words for each.*

- 1. Why are you interested in using your skill set to make an impact as a principal? Include the personal and professional experiences which have inspired and prepared you for this opportunity.*



## Aspiring Principal Program Cohort 7

### Application Part 2: Essay Questions

2. *Describe the most significant work-related leadership role you have taken on. Provide details on the management issues faced (situation/circumstances), explain the specific outcomes achieved, describe which skills you relied on, and summarize what lessons you learned.*

APP Cohort 7 Application Essay Scoresheet

Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Assessor: \_\_\_\_\_

		Scoring Rubric				
		Score (1-3)	3 - Excellent	2 - Good	1 - Fair to Poor	Comments
Question 1	Motivation		Very clear and compelling articulation of motivation in seeking principalship	Clear and compelling articulation of motivation in seeking principalship	Motivation unclear or lacks genuineness	
	Desire/Readiness		Strong evidence of desire and readiness for principalship	Moderate evidence of desire and readiness for principalship	Little or no evidence of desire and readiness for principalship	
	Experience		Inclusion of highly relevant specific personal and professional experiences	Inclusion of relevant specific personal and professional experiences	Excluded personal or professional experience, or example lacked specificity or relevance	
	Leadership Example		Relevant and significant leadership example with especially high stakes or level of responsibility	Relevant and significant leadership example	Leadership example not work-related or significant in responsibility level	
	Outcome		Outcomes achieved particularly impressive in context of situation described	Outcomes achieved successful in context of situation described	Outcomes achieved unclear or unsuccessful	
Question 2	Skills		Demonstration of exceptionally strong leadership skills relevant to the principalship	Demonstration of strong leadership skills relevant to the principalship	Skills weakly demonstrated or have low relevance to principal position	
	Reflection		Lessons learned demonstrate very strong knowledge of self, insight into situation, and ability to express mistakes or opportunities for improvement	Lessons learned demonstrate strong knowledge of self, insight into situation, and ability to express mistakes or opportunities for improvement	Lessons learned not expressed or do not demonstrate strong knowledge of self, insight into situation, and ability to express mistakes or opportunities for improvement	
Overall	Written Expression		Writing samples are eloquent	Writing samples are coherent, well-organized, and grammatically correct but short of eloquent	Writing samples lack clarity or organization, and/or contain spelling or grammatical errors	
Total Score (of 24 possible)						0

## APPENDIX C: GUIDE TO UNIVERSITY PARTNER PROGRAMS SAMPLE PAGE

# The University of Georgia

The University of Georgia (UGA), a land-grant and sea-grant university with statewide commitments and responsibilities, is the state's oldest, most comprehensive, and most diversified institution of higher education<sup>3</sup>.

The College of Education (COE), founded in 1908, is an integral part of UGA. Perennially ranked among the nation's top research-extensive institutes, the College continues to be a center for innovative research, teaching and service projects of local, national and international interest<sup>4</sup>.

The Ed.S. and Ed.D. degrees are offered through COE's Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy (LEAP). [LEAP faculty](#)<sup>5</sup> have gained national and international recognition through numerous contributions in research and policy development. The performance-based Ed.S. and Ed.D. are designed to provide students with face-to-face learning opportunities, as well as site-based experiences in their sponsoring school district.

### UGA in Gwinnett

The University of Georgia Gwinnett Campus provides state-of-the-art classroom space that allows graduate students from the College of Education the option of completing coursework closer to home. The Gwinnett Campus offers classrooms and meeting rooms, an electronic library, and an on-site bookstore. To learn more about the Gwinnett campus visit:

<http://gwinnett.uga.edu/facilities.html>.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.uga.edu>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.coe.uga.edu/>

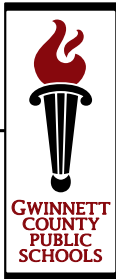
<sup>5</sup> <http://www.coe.uga.edu/leap/about/faculty-staff-directory/>

# APPENDIX D: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR/ SUMMER LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE LIST OF TOPICS



## Gwinnett County Public Schools Leadership Seminars – 2012 Updated 11.12.2012

Date/Time	Seminar Title	Presenter(s)	Target Group	Objective	Projected # of Attendees
4.9.2012	"Qualities of Effective Teachers"	Dr. James Stronge College of William and Mary Williamsburg, VA	District Level Leaders	To identify effective teachers and how to enhance teacher effectiveness.	72 district staff
4.10.2012	"Qualities of Effective Teachers"	Dr. James Stronge College of William and Mary Williamsburg, VA	Assistant Principals	To identify effective teachers and how to enhance teacher effectiveness.	133 assistant principals
4.11.2012	"Qualities of Effective Teachers"	Dr. James Stronge College of William and Mary Williamsburg, VA	Elementary School Principals	To identify effective teachers and how to enhance teacher effectiveness.	79 principals
4.12.2012	"Qualities of Effective Teachers"	Dr. James Stronge College of William and Mary Williamsburg, VA	Middle and High Principals	To identify effective teachers and how to enhance teacher effectiveness.	5 district staff 5 APP residents 63 principals
9.17.2012 8 a.m. - Noon	"Superior Execution and High Reliability"	Jim Eck Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)	High School Principals	To learn about high performing/high reliability systems and the impact of superior execution in school and district improvement efforts.	19 principals 4 special entity principals 10 district staff
9.17.2012 1 p.m. - 5 p.m.	"Superior Execution and High Reliability"	Jim Eck Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)	Middle School Principals	To learn about high performing/high reliability systems and the impact of superior execution in school and district improvement efforts.	26 principals 4 special entity principals 10 district staff
9.18.2012 8 a.m. - Noon	"Superior Execution and High Reliability"	Jim Eck Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)	Elementary School Principals	To learn about high performing/high reliability systems and the impact of superior execution in school and district improvement efforts.	77 principals 10 district staff
9.18.2012 1 p.m. - 5 p.m.	"Superior Execution and High Reliability"	Jim Eck Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)	District Leaders	To learn about high performing/high reliability systems and the impact of superior execution in school and district improvement efforts.	25 district level leaders



## Gwinnett County Public Schools... Creating a System of World-Class Schools

“Success is not world-class leadership development but best-in-industry leaders.” – Bradley Hall

### Quality-Plus Leader Academy Annual Summer Leadership Conference

**CEO/Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks states:** “According to Peter Drucker, ‘Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.’ I am pleased to say that this year’s Summer Leadership Conference is a model of how Gwinnett leaders do the right thing the right way.” For 33 consecutive years, the annual Summer Leadership Conference has been a signature piece of the leadership development focus in Gwinnett County Public Schools, and, in fact, the school system’s culture. The Summer Leadership Conference provides the opportunity to learn from distinguished, nationally known speakers, but, perhaps more importantly, from each other as our own “in-house experts” share best practices in choice sessions.

#### Conference Detail

- ✚ The conference spans two and a half days of collaborative and intense learning.
- ✚ The conference is convened at The Instructional Support Center, Suwanee, Georgia.
- ✚ School principals, assistant principals, and district-level leaders participate each year, with attendance typically over 750.
- ✚ Nationally known and recognized experts present relevant and insightful keynotes each day of the conference.

#### Conference At-A-Glance

- ✚ Over 85 choice sessions, developed and delivered by leaders and teachers focused on:
  - Closing the Achievement Gap
  - Continuous Quality Improvement
  - Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies
  - Safe, Secure, and Orderly Schools
  - Using Assessment Results to Shape Instruction
  - Development and Support of Staff

#### Representative Keynotes

- ✚ Dr. Robert Marzano, “*School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results*”
- ✚ Dr. Anthony Muhammad, “*Transforming School Culture*”
- ✚ Dr. John Antoinetti, “*The Engagement Cube: What’s Engaging Today’s Learners?*”
- ✚ Dr. Robert Barr, “*The Kids Left Behind: Catching Up the Underachieving Children of Poverty*”
- ✚ Kati Haycock, “*Improving Achievement and Closing Gaps Between Groups*”
- ✚ Dr. Timothy Waters, “*From High Anxiety to High Reliability*”
- ✚ Dr. Mark Milliron, “*A New Generation of Learning: Diverse Students, Emerging Technologies, and a Sustainability Challenge*”
- ✚ Dr. Michael Horn, “*Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns*”





**Part V: Associate Superintendent's Appointment Recommendation**     Reappoint     Other (See Part III)

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Steven W. Flynt, Associate Superintendent

**Part VI: Superintendent's 2013-2014 Appointment of Principal**     Reappoint     Reappoint w/ Recognition     Other (See Part III)

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
J. Alvin Wilbanks, CEO/Superintendent

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