VANDERBILT
Peabody College

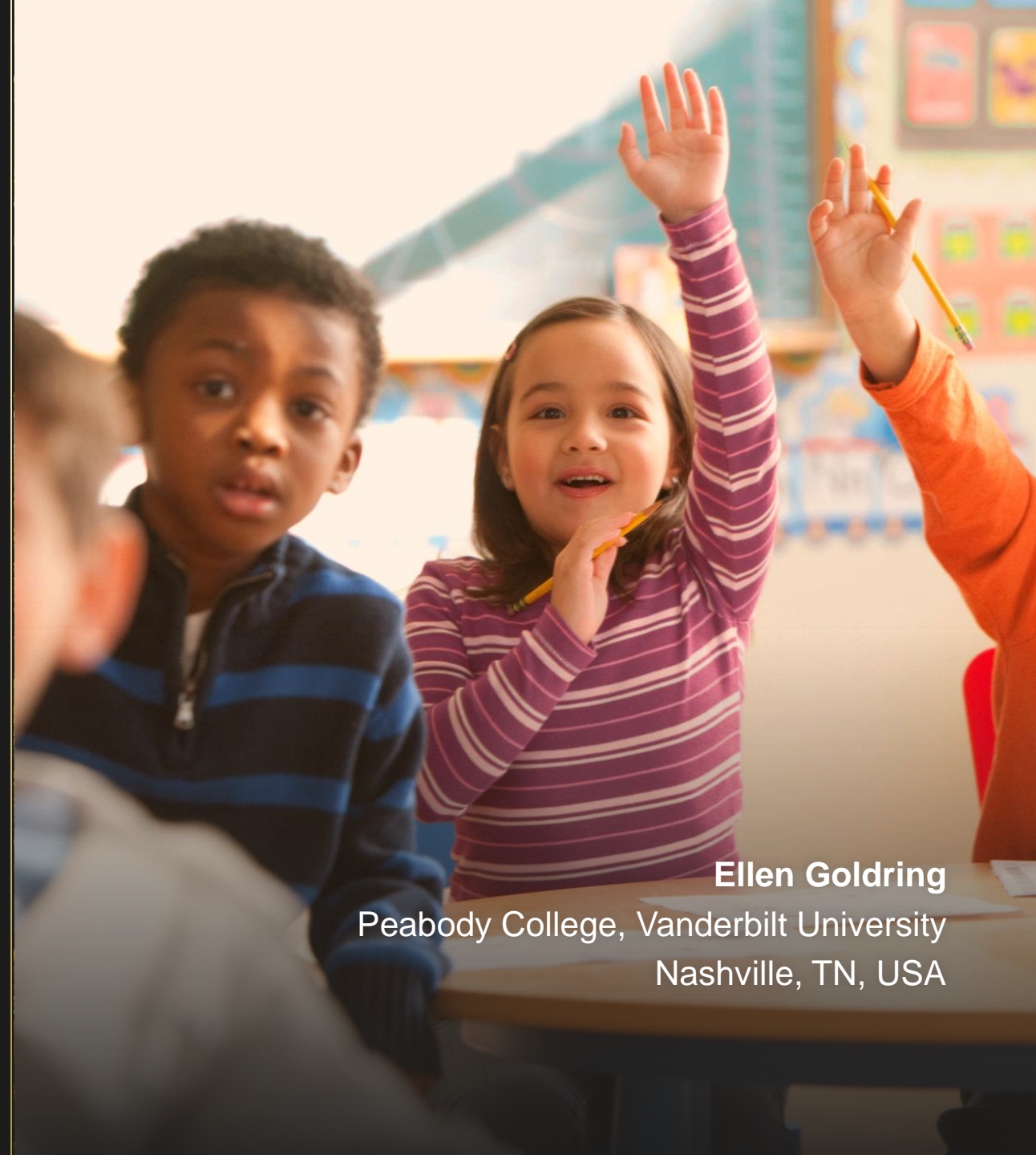# Navigating Principal Pipelines:

Best Practices for Identifying, Developing and Sustaining Effective School Leaders

Ellen Goldring
Peabody College, Vanderbilt University
Nashville, TN, USA

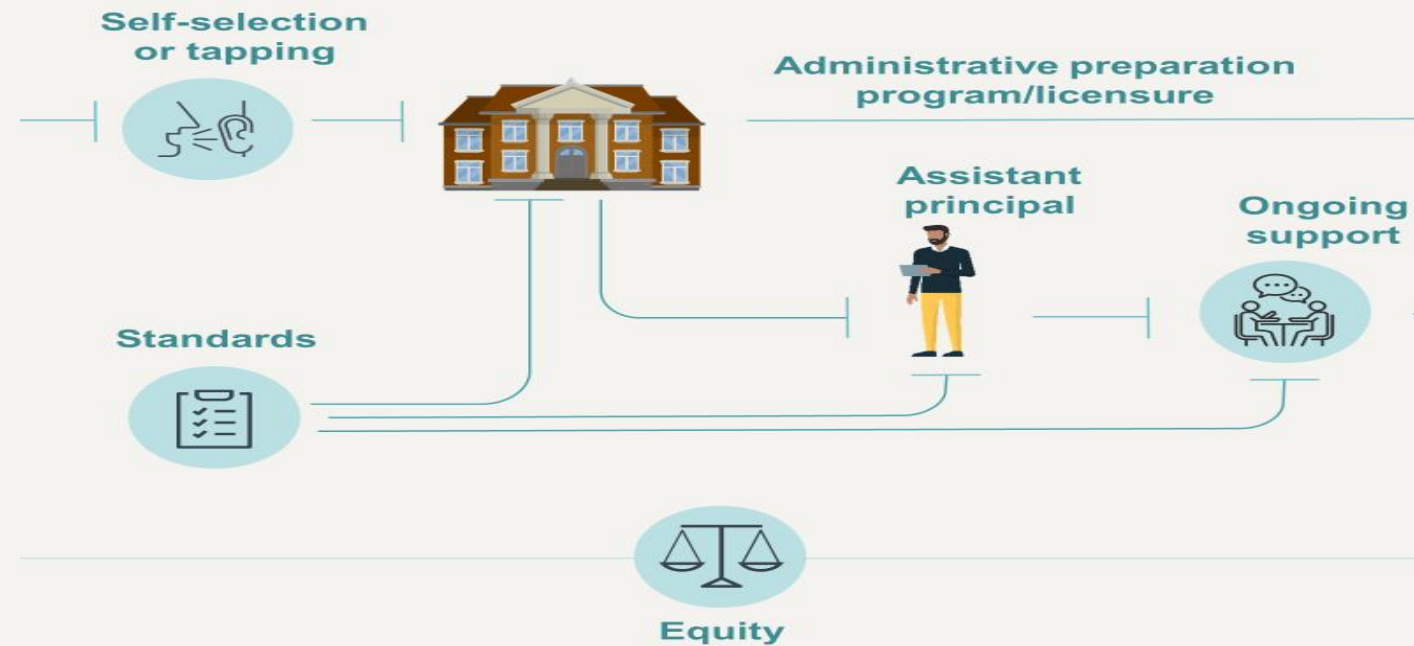The Study of the Principal Pipeline
Learning Community

Consider

- Imagine you have a highly effective teacher who is interested in moving into leadership. What steps would you or your school system take to support this transition?

- Has anyone here been part of a successful leadership transition that was facilitated by a system wide approach? What made it successful?

- How do current policies and practices in your contexts support or hinder the development of school leadership, including identifying future leaders, supporting their development before entering the position?

Succession planning through principal pipelines to address

- Early identification and development potential leaders
- Expanding the pool of qualified candidates
- Reducing risks of leadership transitions
- Preserving continuity and mission-critical objectives
- Proactive talent management approach

Self-selection or tapping

Administrative preparation program/licensure

Assistant principal

Ongoing support

Standards

Equity

Agenda

Describe

- What are leadership pipelines?
- What are pipeline activities, initiatives, and programs?

Examine

- What is the evidence base on pipelines?
- How can pipelines be scaled up?
- What district contexts and conditions support leadership pipelines?

Share

- Recommendations for supporting the development of principal pipelines across cultural contexts and systems

Why Succession Planning and Leadership Pipelines?
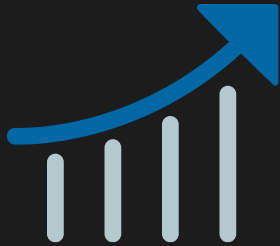
School systems globally face challenges of school leadership

Threats

Retirements and vacancies

Turnover

Declining interest

Teacher shortages

Low enrollment in education programs

Opportunities

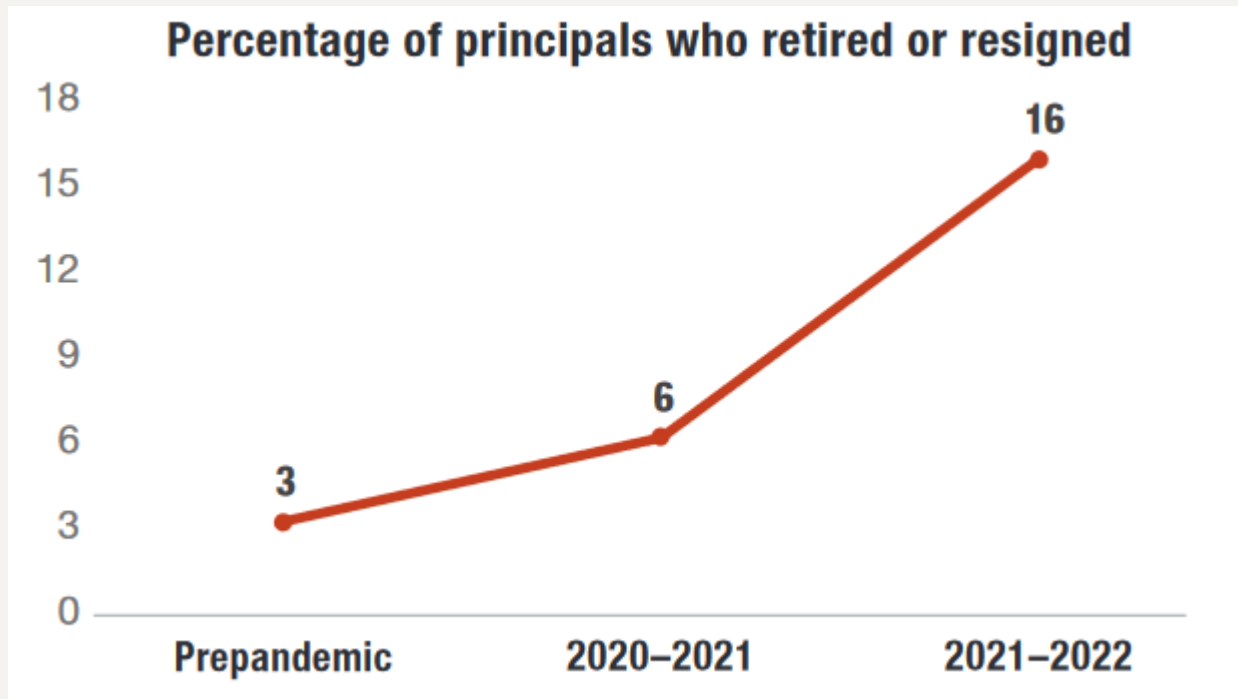Recruiting new leaders

Reframing leadership competencies

Including new voices

Creating new networks

Rethinking learning approaches

Increasing principal attrition in the US

Percentage of principals who retired or resigned

Survey data comparison: Principal retirements and resignations during 2021-2022 vs. pre-pandemic - Source: Fall 2022 survey (n=295) and Summer 2021 survey (n=279)

DILIBERTI, & SCHWARTZ, 2024, RAND

: "What percentage of your school principals retired or resigned at any point during the 2021–2022 school year? which was administered in fall 2022 (n = 295); "What was the typical percentage of your [school principals] who retired or resigned annually prepandemic?" which was administered in summer 2021 (n = 279); "What percentage of your school principals] retired or resigned at the end of the 2020–2021 school year?" which was administered in summer 2021 (n = 278).

Nationally, the percentage of schools with assistant principals has increased.

Why are we facing a principal shortage?
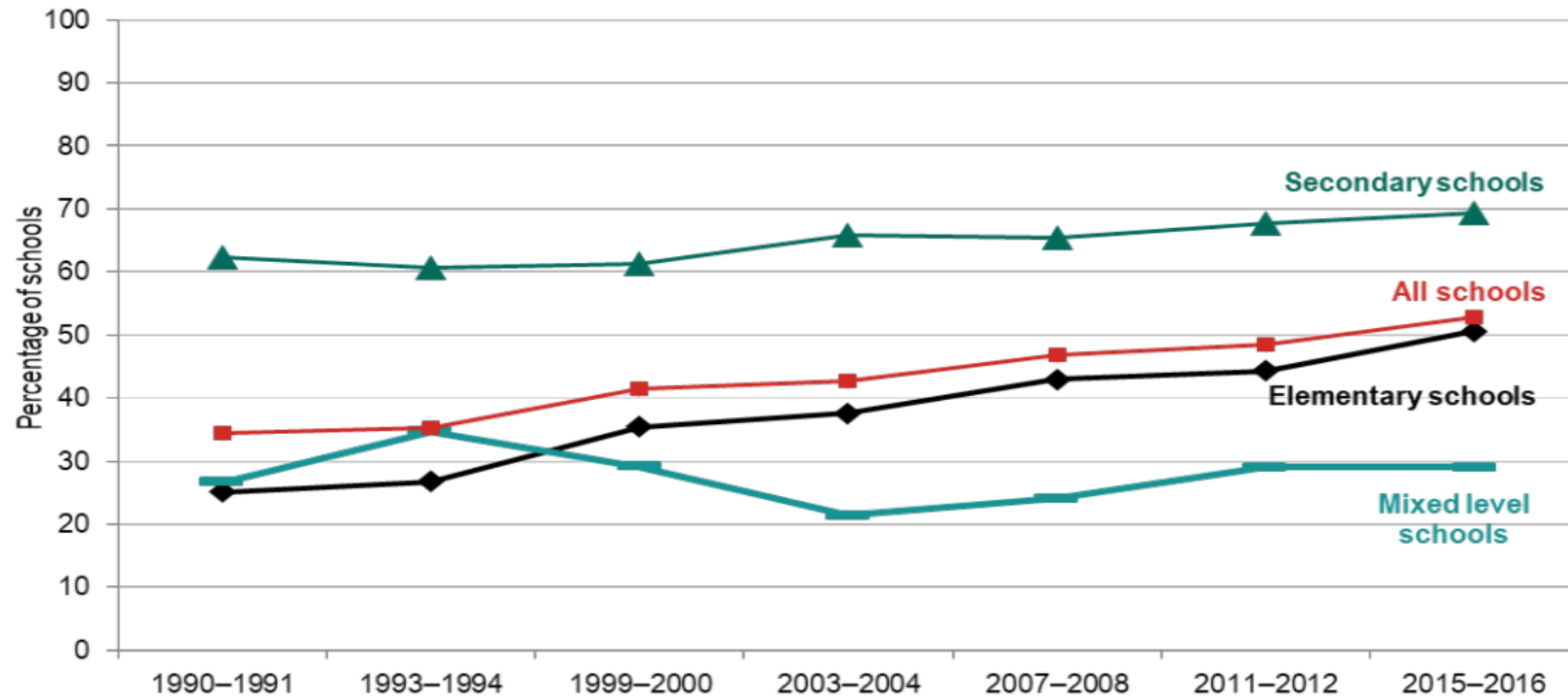
Source: Schools and Staffing Survey/National Teacher and Principal Survey, 1990–1991, 1993–1994, 1999–2000, 2003–2004, 2007–2008, 2011–2012, 2015–2016.

Note: Number of schools ranges from 8,970 in 1990–1991 to 5,770 in 2015–2016. Percentage represents schools that have at least one full-time assistant principal. Estimates are nationally representative. Mixed level schools have both elementary and secondary levels, such as K–12 schools.

Why Succession Planning Strategy

Turnover in districts, especially turnover of school and district leaders, can negatively impact student outcomes… Succession planning requires identifying talent who can step into critical roles immediately and ensuring they have the institutional knowledge and development necessary to do so efficiently and effectively… Without careful planning for transitions, districts fall into the trap of simply replacing key staff members without the essential overlap and mentoring necessary to ensure more immediate efficacy.

School District of Philadelphia ,2023

Why a comprehensive leadership approach to pipelines **<u>now</u>**?

- Rapid technological advancements

- Need for resilience in crises

- Evolving knowledge and skills

- Changing expectations

Benjamin Laker, Forbes Magazine, May 9, 2024

What are Principal Pipelines?

Principal Pipelines Defined

- Systematic approach to succession planning

- **Goal:** Sustainable supply of high-quality principals

Activities include:

- **Identifying promising teacher leaders**

- **Providing leadership training and development opportunities**

- **Establishing clear pathways and advancement criteria**

- **Hiring alignment and placement**

- **Offering ongoing support and evaluation feedback**

Seven Domains of Pipeline Pipelines

DOMAIN 1
Leader standards

- Articulate differentiated leader competencies and dispositions
- Head of UTP or Inspector General, teacher leaders, principals

DOMAIN 2
Preparation

- Processes that encourage staff to become school leaders
- Professional development for aspiring principals
- Training and certification programs aligned with district priorities and leader standards.

DOMAIN 3
Selective hiring and placement

- District talent pool process to screen individuals
- Criteria used to evaluate and select candidates
- Systematic processes tied to leader standards.

DOMAIN 4
On-the-job support and evaluation

- Evaluations aligned to leader standards
- Evaluation aligned to the role
- Individualized coaching
- Actionable feedback for improvement.

DOMAIN 5
Principal supervision

- Improve or create support roles for principals
- Prepare a cohort of future principal supervisors
- Involved in identifying leaders
- Step in the career progression

DOMAIN 6
Leader tracker systems

- Develop data management systems for talent identification placement, and support

DOMAIN 7
Systems of support

- Specific position and office specifically dedicated leadership pipelines development and support
- Ongoing sustainably

Principal Pipeline Domains: An Aligned System

Greenville School District

District Profile: 2024

Region: Southeast (South Carolina)

District size: ~80,000 (77,888)

Student demographics:
22% Black; 20% Hispanic; 50% white; 5% multiracial; 3% Asian; less than 1% American Indian or Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander

18.8 % Limited English Proficient[2]

15.8 % Students with Disabilities

55.7 % "Pupils in Poverty"

Number of schools: 97
Superintendent tenure: 2012 -present
Joined PPLC: Year 1 (2019-20)

[1] Greenville County Schools. (2024).
[2] Royster, B. (2023).

Our Purpose

We want skilled and committed school leaders who sustain a climate conducive to the highest levels of learning and the retention of quality personnel.

Our system of preparation, support, and evaluation creates a pipeline of leaders from the classroom to the central office - leaders who prioritize relationships, robust programming, academic excellence, and well-being to maximize the potential of every student.

We provide

- Pipeline programming aligned to standards and priority practices
- Strategies to advance the skills of administrators as individuals and in groups
- Proactive and responsive coaching and support to improve practice
- Evaluation and growth planning

Our Goal

Personalized preparation and support that ensures every school benefits from the leadership that sustains commitment to common goals and offers limitless futures for each of its students.

Greenville County Schools Principal Pipeline

Teacher Leader	Leader of Teachers	Administrator	School Leader	Leader of Leaders
IN-CLASS LEADER *Initiative, Communication, Relationships* Lead a Team or Project	**INSTRUCTIONAL COACH** *Ongoing pedagogy and coaching training*	**ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT** *Lead people and change beyond core function*	**PRINCIPAL** *Lead & mentor others Share best practice, Serve on advisory/leadership teams*	**CENTRAL OFFICE LEADER** *Advance skill to build principal capacity and support schools*
Mentor/Peer Evaluator	L.E.A.D. Institute	New AA/AP Mentor	Principal Induction Program	Principal Supervisor Academy
Master Teacher	New IC Mentor	Instructional Leader Academy	New Principal Mentor	
Teacher Forum	Impact Leadership GCS	Aspiring Principal Institute (API)	Coaching from Supervisor	Executive Leader Institute
Lead. Empower. Advocate. Develop. (L.E.A.D.) Institute	**ADMIN-LICENSED TEACHER LEADER** *Formal and informal leadership opportunities*			
Impact Leadership GCS - Clemson University Ed. Leadership partnership	L.E.A.D. Institute			

GREENVILLE COUNTY SCHOOLS
LEADER
ACADEMY

Teaming | Collegial Problem Solving | Mentoring/Coaching | Opportunity to Lead

Succession Planning Principal Pipelines

- **Talent management**—identying people
- **Knowledge management**—knowledge, skills, dispositions, actions and practices
- **Business and administrative management**—knowing the system and the context

New Frameworks for Principals for a New Time – Rethinking Standards

What principals need to know and be able to do: Consensus or consider change?

Establish resilience

Implement problem-solutions

Center equity

Foster wellbeing and efficacy

Develop political savviness.

What is the evidence on Principal Pipelines?

Evidence on Principal Pipelines

Effects: Increased principal effectiveness and retention

Principal Pipeline Initiative – 6 districts

- Pipeline-district schools with newly placed principals outperformed comparison schools in other districts after three years.

- The difference in student achievement was more than 6 percentile points in reading and almost 3 percentile points in math.

- Pipeline districts schools had stronger principal retention than comparisons schools in districts without pipelines. (8 fewer losses after three years out of 100)

- Components Appear to Work as a Cohesive Whole

Turnbull, et al 2013, Gates, et al 2019)

Can pipelines be implemented and scaled up in many more districts

Research has documented that while many district initiatives thrive on a smaller scale, their success cannot always be replicated on a larger scale (Coburn, 2003; Elmore, 1996).

Scaling up and Implementation in Districts

- Implementation in 84 districts with Wallace foundation support
  - **Districts teams**
    - Attended whole-group convenings
    - Tools and knowledge resources
    - Expert consultant
- No other financial or support resources
- Study data from interviews and surveys
  - **Interviews**: 86 central office leaders in 30 districts (Spring/Summer 2022)
  - **Surveys:** 376 central office leaders in 62 districts (Fall 2021- Spring 2022)
  - **Interviews:** Again in 2022 and 2023

Interviews and surveys focused on:

- **Experiences with leadership pipelines**

- **Status and conceptualization of pipelines**

- **Pipeline funding (including the uses of federal funding)**

- **District context and central office organization of pipeline implementation**

Accelerated scale-up model
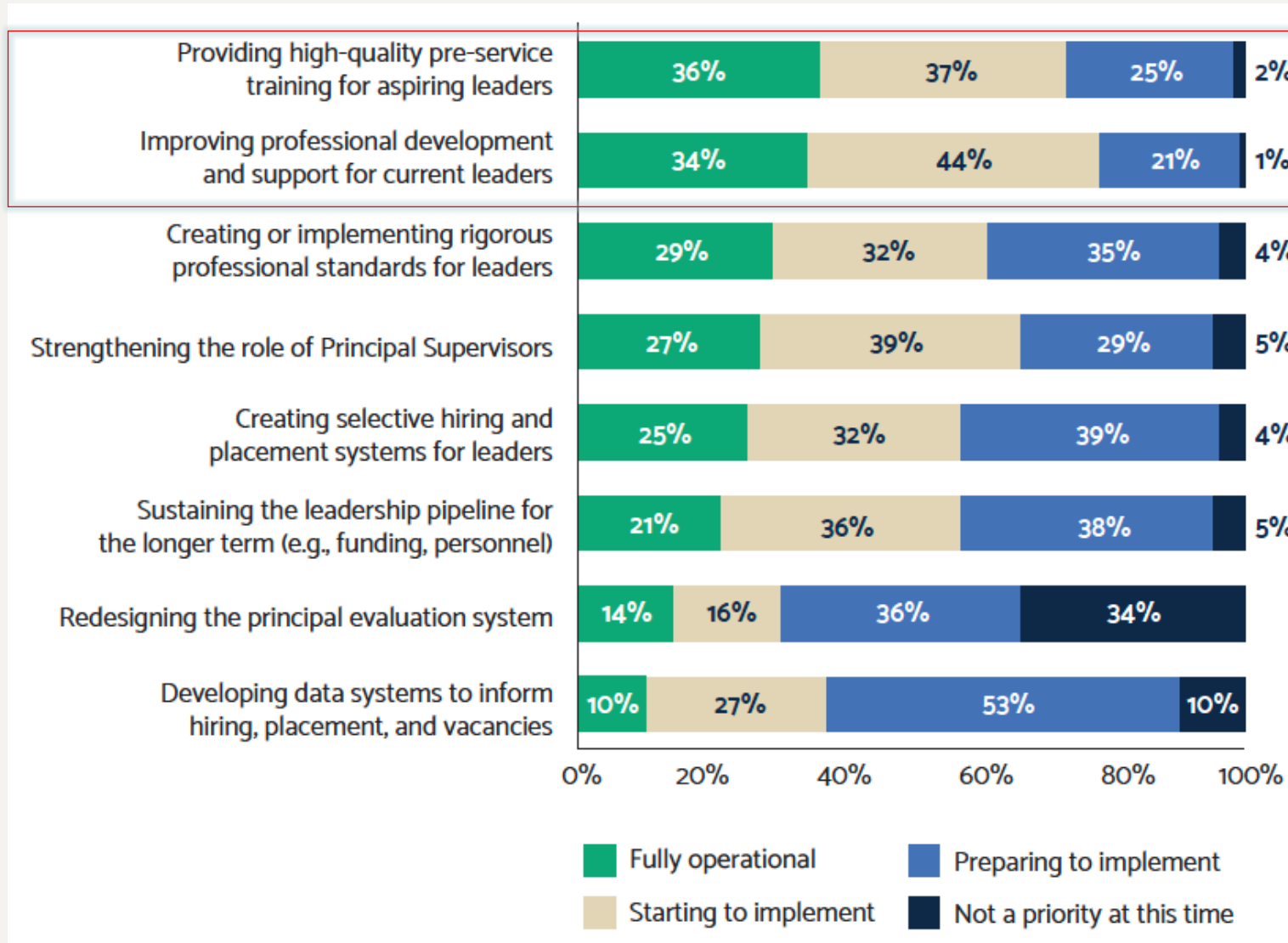## 84 school districts

Districts in the (PPLC) Principal Pipeline Learning Community had access to supports around pipeline planning and development -Wallace Foundation

Self-Study Guide	Early Win	Convenings	Consultant
Workplans	Knowledge-based Resources	Statewide and regional networks	

PPLC districts reported multiple goals and priorities for principal pipelines
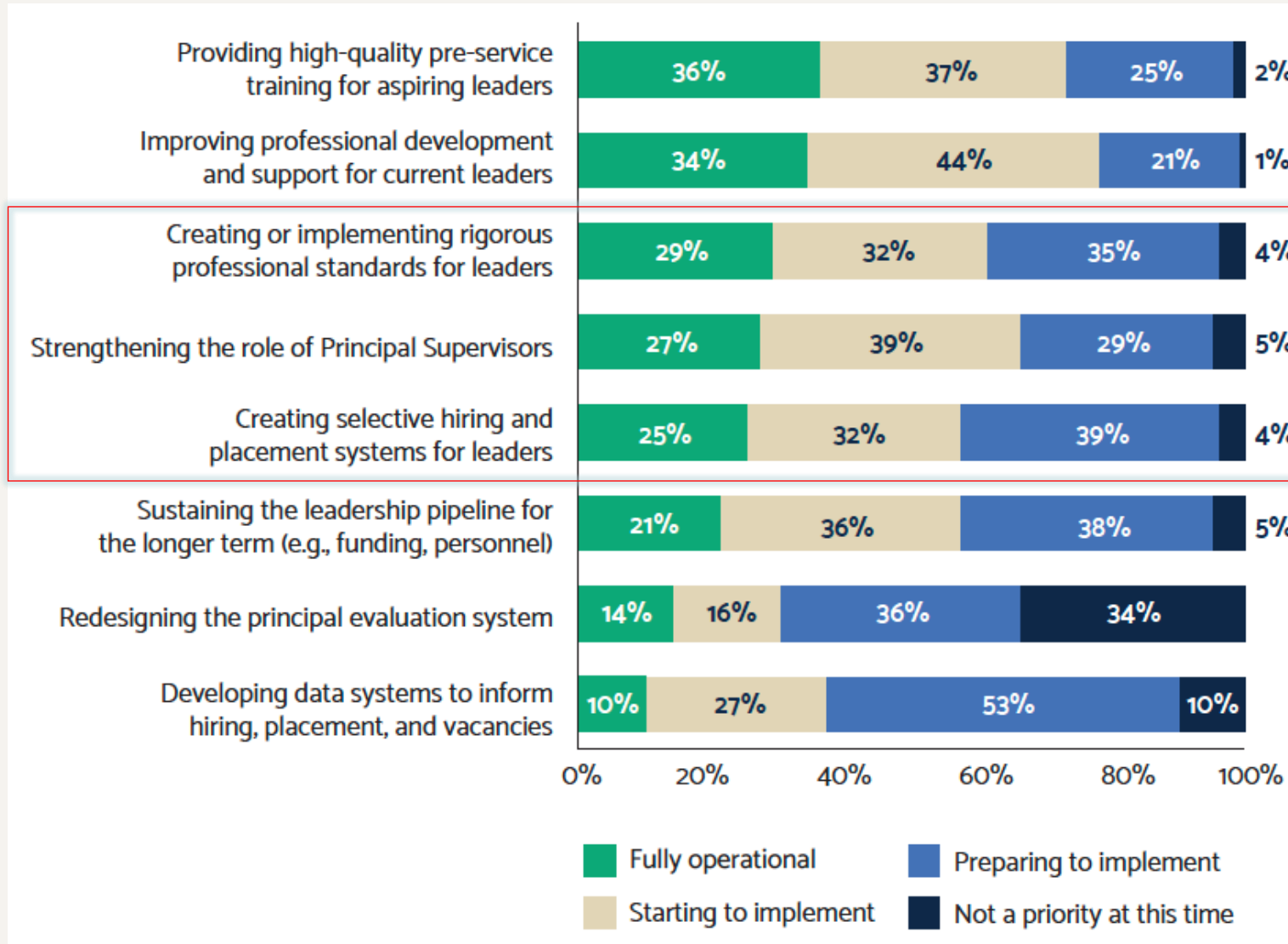
Building a bench

Addressing the shortage of qualified leaders and building a pool of applicants

Developing quality

Improving the effectiveness of leaders, especially in terms of instructional leadership and working in high-need schools

Increasing retention

Retaining qualified staff at all levels to a create career progression

Growing-your-own

Recruiting from within to capitalize on local context and knowledge

Creating equitable processes

Creating consistent and transparent processes for becoming a principal and making principal appointments

Improving diversity

Increasing the diversity of school leaders to reflect the student body

Establishing alignment

Connecting disparate programs and initiatives to create a complete system

Expanding opportunities

Increasing and adding new staff groups into the pipeline (teachers, teacher leaders, central office staff, APs)

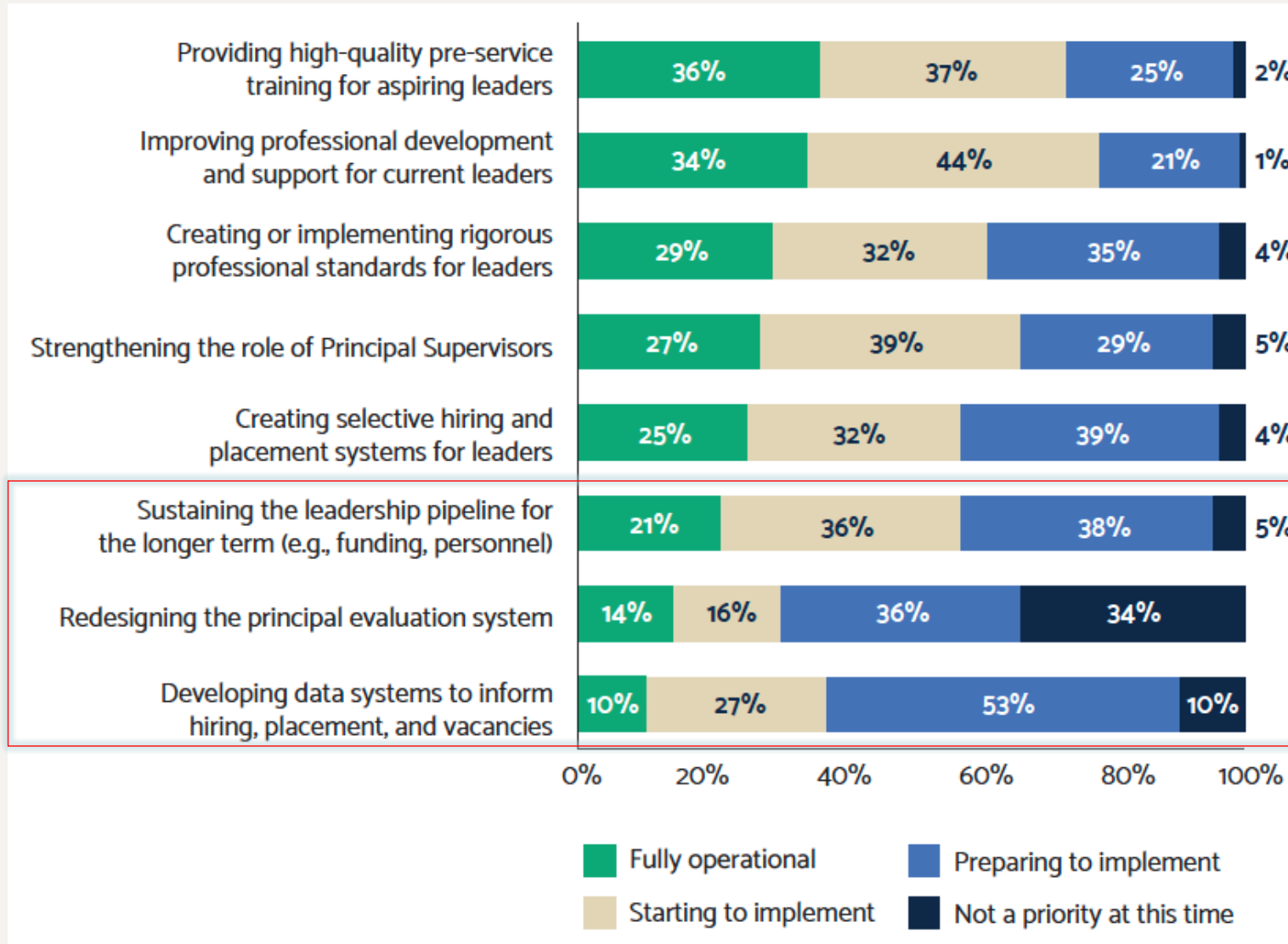Note. The survey question read, "Which option best describes the status of your district's leadership pipeline in the following areas this school year (2021–22)?" Propensity weights were applied and "don't know" answers were excluded. N=294.

Providing high-quality pre-service training for aspiring leaders: Fully operational 36%, Starting to implement 37%, Preparing to implement 25%, Not a priority at this time 2%

Improving professional development and support for current leaders: Fully operational 34%, Starting to implement 44%, Preparing to implement 21%, Not a priority at this time 1%

Creating or implementing rigorous professional standards for leaders: Fully operational 29%, Starting to implement 32%, Preparing to implement 35%, Not a priority at this time 4%

Strengthening the role of Principal Supervisors: Fully operational 27%, Starting to implement 39%, Preparing to implement 29%, Not a priority at this time 5%

Creating selective hiring and placement systems for leaders: Fully operational 25%, Starting to implement 32%, Preparing to implement 39%, Not a priority at this time 4%

Sustaining the leadership pipeline for the longer term (e.g., funding, personnel): Fully operational 21%, Starting to implement 36%, Preparing to implement 38%, Not a priority at this time 5%

Redesigning the principal evaluation system: Fully operational 14%, Starting to implement 16%, Preparing to implement 36%, Not a priority at this time 34%

Developing data systems to inform hiring, placement, and vacancies: Fully operational 10%, Starting to implement 27%, Preparing to implement 53%, Not a priority at this time 10%

Legend:
- Fully operational
- Starting to implement
- Preparing to implement
- Not a priority at this time

Domains that required more *Coordination* were slower to be fully operable

Note. The survey question read, "Which option best describes the status of your district's leadership pipeline in the following areas this school year (2021–22)?" Propensity weights were applied and "don't know" answers were excluded. N=294.

Domains that required more complex long-term RE-design lagged behind

Note. The survey question read, "Which option best describes the status of your district's leadership pipeline in the following areas this school year (2021–22)?" Propensity weights were applied and "don't know" answers were excluded. N=294.

Networks are key

- Identify career opportunities and talent

- Build their teams

- Anticipate change within the district

- Keep finger on the pulse

- Key to talent identification and development

   Good networks are :

- ❏ open

- ❏ diverse

- ❏ deep

National Data: Pipelines are a strategy used in many districts across the US

Summary of Districts' Principal Pipeline Activities as of the 2023–2024 School Year

All Districts (%)	Domain	Small Districts	Medium Districts	Large Districts
74	On-the-job support and evaluation	↓	↓	(Reference)
60	Leader standards	↓	(Not different)	(Reference)
47	Principal preparation	↓	(Not different)	(Reference)
39	Principal supervision	↓	↓	(Reference)
35	Selective hiring and placement	↓	↓	(Reference)
29	Systems of support	↓	↓	(Reference)
25	Leader tracking systems	↓	↓	(Reference)

↓ Statistically lower
(blank) Not statistically different
(gray) Reference group

Diliberti, L. Schwartz, DiNicola
RAND, Sep 19, 2024

What explains
district implementation and take up?

Our superintendent is very supportive of the pipeline work: Strongly agree 58%, Agree 38%, Disagree 3%, Strongly disagree 1%

The people leading the pipeline work have a lot of relevant expertise: Strongly agree 51%, Agree 46%, Disagree 3%

The core team involved in the pipeline work collaborate well together: Strongly agree 47%, Agree 47%, Disagree 5%, Strongly disagree 1%

The pipeline work fits well with other district initiatives: Strongly agree 46%, Agree 48%, Disagree 5%, Strongly disagree 1%

The pipeline work has a clear leader: Strongly agree 41%, Agree 38%, Disagree 19%, Strongly disagree 2%

Our district has available financial resources necessary for pipeline work: Strongly agree 32%, Agree 43%, Disagree 20%, Strongly disagree 5%

The people leading the pipeline work have enough time to do the work: Strongly agree 12%, Agree 42%, Disagree 36%, Strongly disagree 10%

Legend: Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree

Districts
had different
capacity to engage
in pipeline
take-up

*Superintendent
Support Strengthens
Pipelines*

"With superintendent support … the pipeline becomes this hub that brings our departments together and connects us and helps us see outside of our own little silo."
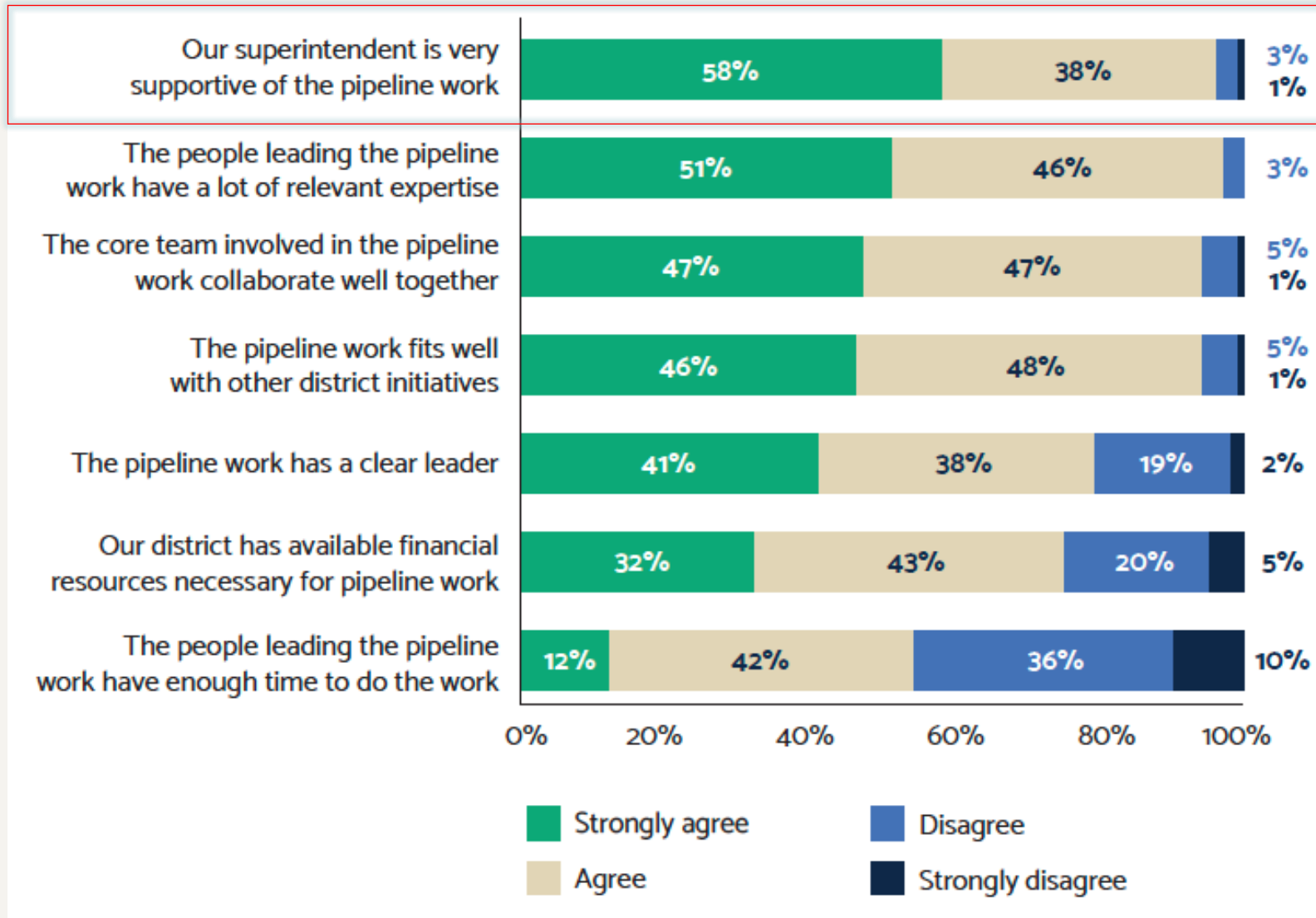
Note. The survey question read, "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your district's leadership pipeline work this school year (2021-2022)? Propensity weights were applied and "don't know" answers were excluded. N=295.
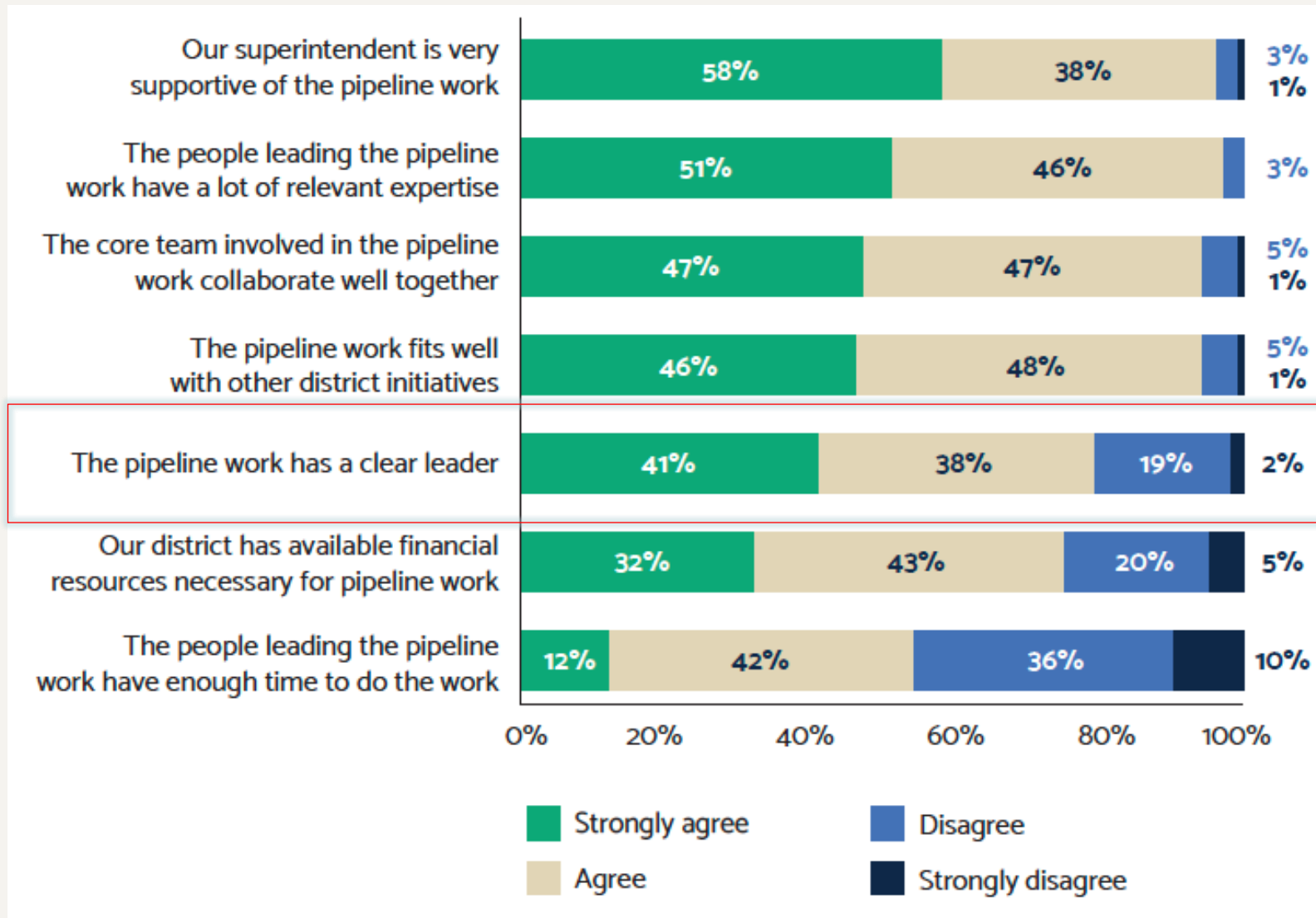
Clear Leadership Facilitates Pipeline Success

"And we also have a team leader. A lot of it is her leadership to be honest with you … she sets expectations, we continues to meet every single week.

Note. The survey question read, "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your district's leadership pipeline work this school year (2021-2022)? Propensity weights were applied and "don't know" answers were excluded. N=295.

Building for success

Strong and system-wide vision

- Clear vision and goals for improving leadership development from the superintendent
- Aligned to other district priorities and plans

Understanding of pipelines

- Grasped the systemic, aligned approach
- Open to learning about new conceptualizations

Viable team

- Assemble a stable team with a senior leadership and access
- Clear pipeline leader
- Clear expectations and commitments from team members
- Locate the team among people/departments who could best leverage change

What are Core Components of Leadership Pipelines?

The most essential and indispensable components of an intervention, practice, policy or program

Core Implementation Components: Domains
Who? What? Training, Coaching, Academies Performance Measurement

Organizational Components of the Pipeline:
Selection, Program Evaluation, Administrative Data , Systems. Leadership team, policies and placement within the system

Context Factors:
Social, Economic, Political
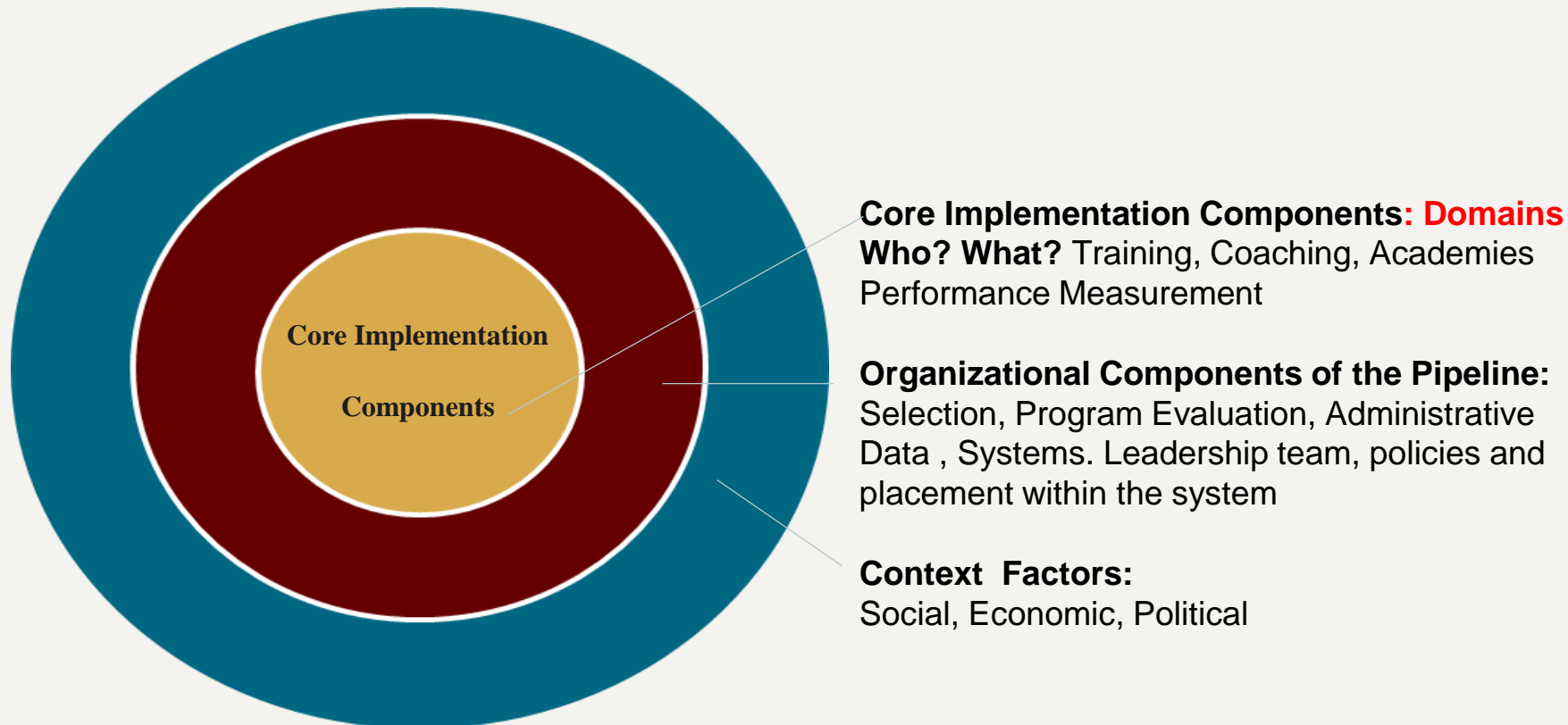
Pipelines helped districts create more transparency, consistency, and equity in leadership pathways

- Communicate the steps to take along the pipeline

- More clearly explain available supports

- Systematic approaches helped address actual and perceived "secrecy, favoritism, and bias in principal appointments"

" We envision a leadership pipeline as something where pretty much everyone within the organization sees the through line [to leadership]"

Central office leader

Recommendations

GARNER SUPPORT

Create design teams with broad engagement

A vocal champion that communicates the vision for leadership pipelines

CONSIDER

New frameworks and standards

Design process

ASSEMBLE

Assemble a "core team" of district administrators with a clear leader who will serve as the hub

Central office coordination

CREATE

Aligned pipeline goals and evaluation metrics to broader district strategic planning.

Consider:

How do you see the concept of principal pipelines fitting within your cultural and educational context?	**How would you customize or change a principal pipeline** to accommodate the diverse needs of schools in your country?	**What are some unique challenges and opportunities** you face that could impact the implementation of principal pipelines?	**What qualities do you believe are essential for school leaders** in your country, and how can a principal pipeline support the development of these qualities?
What resources are available for leadership development, and how might they be leveraged to support a principal pipeline?	**How are leadership transitions currently managed** in your schools, and what improvements could a principal pipeline offer?	**What potential barriers do you anticipate** in adopting a principal pipeline approach, and how might you address them?	**How important is networking and collaboration** among school leaders in your country, and how could a principal pipeline facilitate this?

Thank you

Ellen Goldring

ellen.goldring@vanderbilt.edu

wallacefoundation.org/report/planning-and-developing-principal-pipelines-approaches-opportunities-and-challenges

Accelerated scale-up model

Districts in the PPLC learning community engaged with numerous supports around their pipeline planning and development work:

- **Self-Study Guide.** *The Principal Pipeline Self-Study Guide for Districts* is a guide that central office leaders use to take stock of and improve their policies, processes, and structures around pipeline development. The guide, developed by Policy Studies Associates, steers districts through a holistic assessment of the current status of each of the domains of the leadership pipeline, providing rubrics and guiding questions based on evidence-based indicators of implementations for each domain.
- **Early Win.** Based on insights from the self-study assessment, districts weighed their needs and priorities, then selected and carried out a smaller, feasible task aligned with their overall change strategy. Districts wrote brief descriptions to document their work.
- **Workplan.** Each district was expected to complete a workplan based upon the self-study guide, in which they set one-, three-, and five-year goals for pipeline domains.

Accelerated Take-Up Model

- **Consultant.** Each district worked with a consultant provided by the Wallace Foundation who provided guidance periodically. Consultants met with district leaders to support their self-study, workplan, and ongoing development and implementation of pipeline domains.

- **Convenings.** Central office leaders from across districts came together in-person or virtually for discussions, support, and resources around pipelines. Convenings typically included presentations, as well as smaller breakout sessions for participants.

- **Knowledge-based resources.** Leaders were provided research-based resources, such as *What It Takes to Operate and Maintain Principal Pipelines* or *Changing the Principal Supervisor Role to Better Support Principals: Evidence from the Principal Supervisor Initiative* at convenings or through their consultants.

- **Statewide Networks.** Districts from the same state were organized together to meet with their consultants to determine a state-wide focus around leadership pipeline development. These occurred in states with large numbers of participating districts.

Seven domains of principal pipelines

- **Leader Standards.** Articulate principal competencies and dispositions

- **Pre-service principal preparation.** Develop programming internally or with university partners to ensure training and certification programs are aligned with district priorities and leader standards.

- **Selective hiring and principal placement.** Revise hiring and placement processes to be systematic and tied to leader standards.

- **On-the-job evaluation and support.** Align evaluation with leader standards and provide actionable feedback for improvement. Develop coaching and mentoring to promote growth.

- **Principal supervisors.** Improve support roles for principals.

- **Leader tracking systems.** Develop data management systems for talent identification placement, and support

- **Systems and capacity to support and sustain principal pipeline.** Create a position or office specifically dedicated to leadership development and pipeline support.

In Tennessee, assistant principals spend more time on discipline and less time on observing teachers and instructional planning than principals do, but there is a lot of overlap in roles
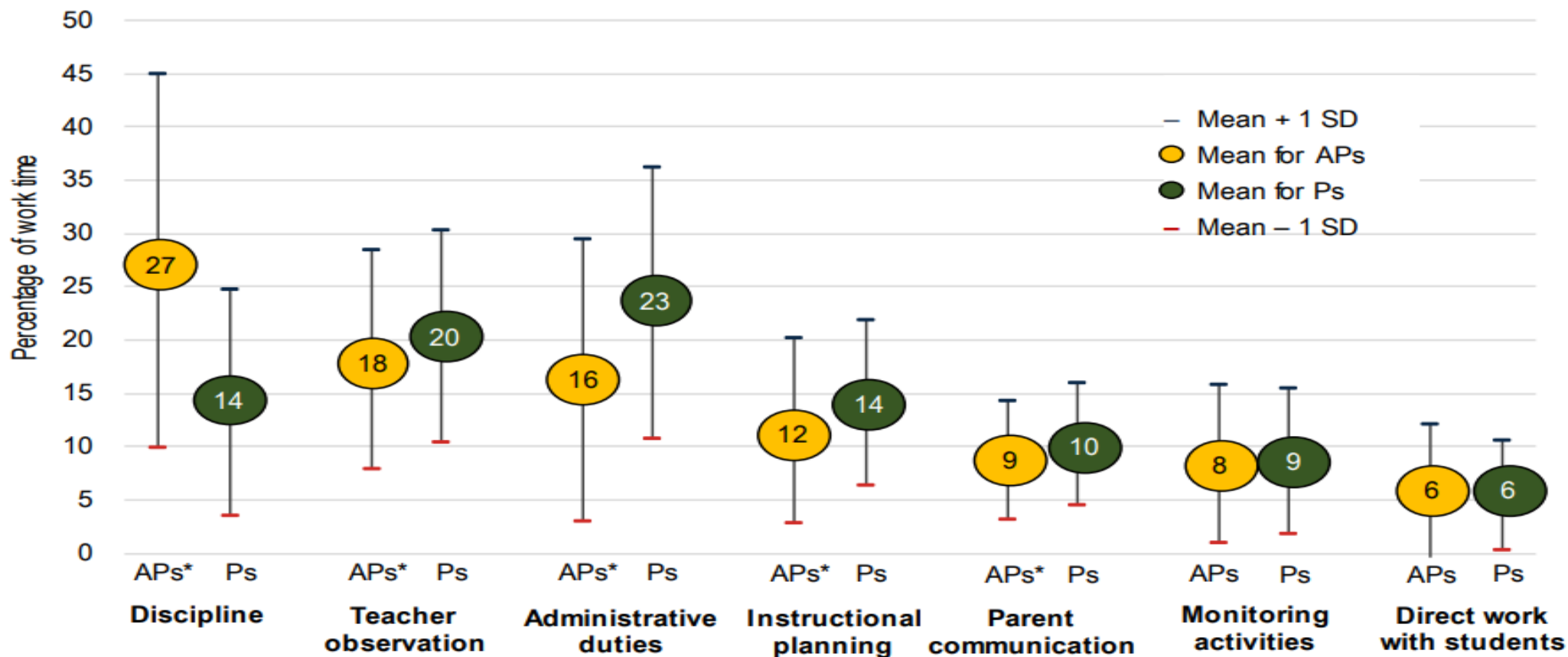
Source: Tennessee Educator Survey data from Tennessee Department of Education, 2017–2018.

Note: Some 775 assistant principals and 793 principals responded to this question. The survey asked educators "in an average week, what percentage of your work time do you devote to each of the following activities?" The percentage of work time does not sum to 100 because "other" activities are not shown.

* Indicates whether time spent was significantly different for principals compared to assistant principals.

APs = assistant principals; Ps = principals; SD = standard deviation.

Self-Study Guide. *The Principal Pipeline Self-Study Guide for Districts*