



**TAKING CHARGE OF
PRINCIPAL SUPPORT:**

**An In-Depth Look at
NYC Leadership Academy's
Approach to Coaching
Principals**



TAKING CHARGE OF PRINCIPAL SUPPORT:

AN IN-DEPTH
LOOK AT NYC
LEADERSHIP
ACADEMY'S
APPROACH TO
COACHING
PRINCIPALS



JPG Photography

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from the CEO	5
The Real Power of Coaching: Developing the Professional Practice of Principals in Support of School Improvement	7
Our Vision for Impact	11
An Overview of Our Coaching Work	13
Coaching Aligned to Leadership Standards	19
NYCLA’s Approach to Coaching	27
Understanding the Landscape: Assessing Current Leadership Supports	37
Program Design	43
Coach Development	53
Program Evaluation	61
A Final Word	65
Additional Supports Available	66
Endnotes	67

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



NYC Leadership Academy has been working with school leaders in New York City and across the nation on behalf of students for more than a decade, and we are proud of our work and what we have been able to accomplish. We've been developing leaders and helping build effective, contextually relevant school leadership programs since our founding.

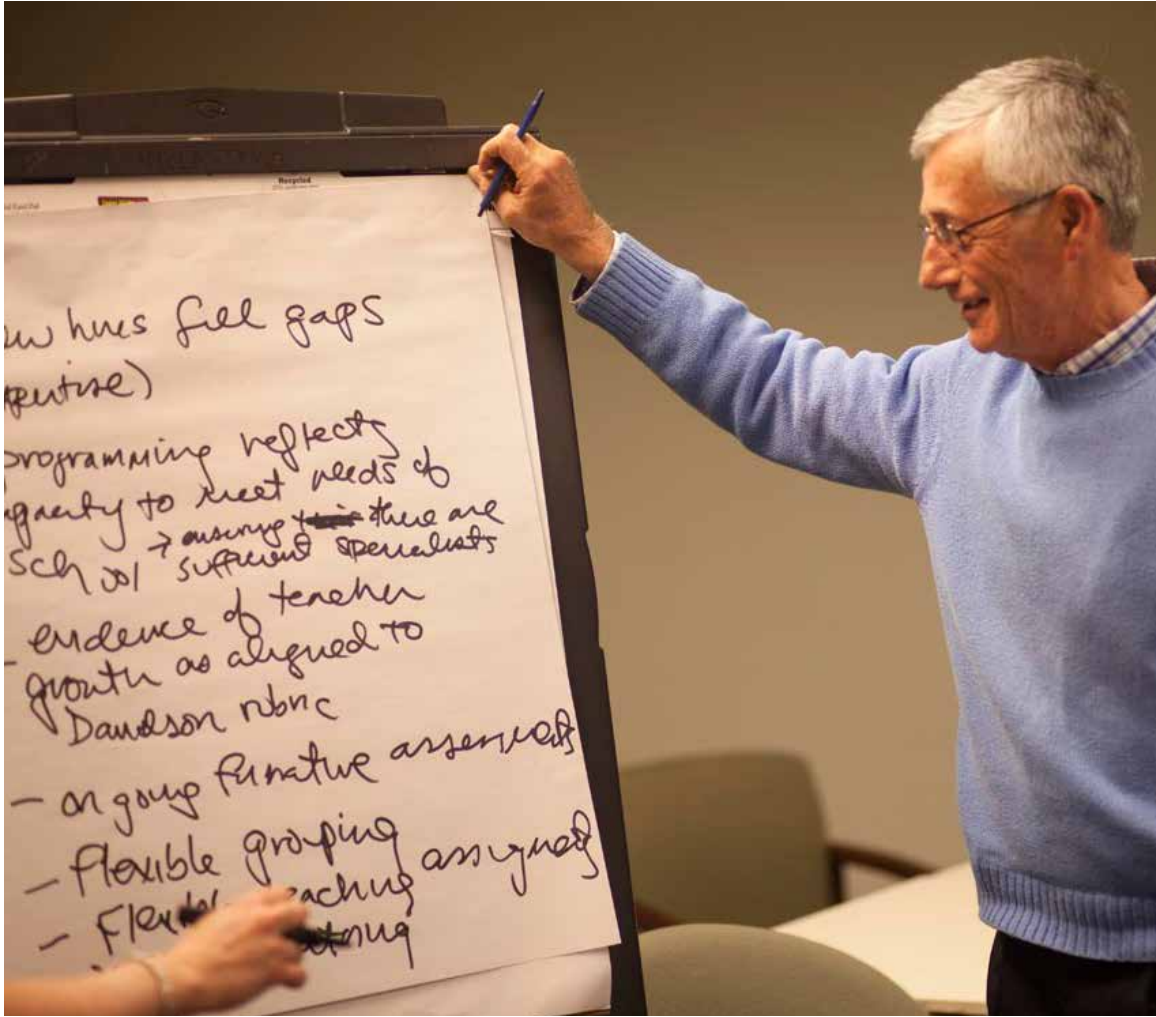
During the 2013-14 school year, we coached more than 400 principals in New York City alone, and according to our data, 96% of those principals agreed that coaching positively impacted their leadership practice.

As we have developed our coaching model and deepened our coaches' practice, our work has also expanded in scope. To date we have partnered with 38 districts, states, and organizations across the country to help build principal coaching programs and develop local capacity to support and empower leaders. In addition to our coaching work for the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE), we have also directly coached school leaders for the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and the School District of Philadelphia (SDP).

While our coaching model has been deepened through lessons learned from adapting our work to the needs of different contexts within school systems, our belief in standards-based, facilitative coaching as an essential tool for leadership development has remained constant. Whether we work with coaches, district leaders, or directly with principals, we maintain the core belief that coaching is in service of schools and, ultimately, of students.

As we celebrate our first decade of service, we are excited to share in this guide the wealth of experience we've gained in the field of school leadership coaching. We offer examples of how other districts have, with our help, adapted our approach and created sustainable support systems for their school leaders. We hope this guide will provide inspiration for other school systems and partner organizations that are also focused on supporting and advancing effective school leadership practice. Together, we can develop and support school leaders in their increasingly complex work, so that all students can thrive and succeed.

Irma Zardoya
President and CEO
July 2015



THE REAL POWER OF COACHING: DEVELOPING THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF PRINCIPALS IN SUPPORT OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

One of my fondest moments from my time at NYC Leadership Academy took place in the principal's office of a Manhattan high school. A member of our coaching staff and I were visiting a first-year principal, a powerhouse of a woman who had been hired to turn around a very complex high school that was slated for possible closure.

The coach had been a teacher, an assistant principal, a principal, and an assistant superintendent during his much-celebrated career. He was now a dedicated coach, serious about his coaching practice, and eager to learn new coaching skills, different from those he used in his supervisory capacities. Having honed his questioning techniques, he was able to reflect back the assumptions his principals were making in a way that helped them see limitations and create possibilities. As he was profoundly invested in the success of school leaders as a mechanism toward student achievement, he was interested in deepening his coaching skills in order to maximize every possible leadership learning opportunity.

The purpose of our visit was two-fold. First, there was the regularly scheduled coaching session between the coach and the principal in which the two would step away from the day-to-day activities, reflect on her improvement efforts and leadership practices, and strategize for contin-

ued improvement. Second, the meeting was an opportunity for the coach to get coaching support as part of an individualized "master class" in which I would observe coaching sessions, and then reflect back to coach and principal what I was observing in the dynamic in an effort to make the coaching as effective as possible. In essence, I was there to coach the coach.

The pressure was on this first-year principal to make swift changes that would result in measurable student performance gains. Having spent several years as an assistant principal at a higher-performing high school, she was taken aback by some of the realities she encountered. Teacher morale was low. Student performance was low. Students in their second and third years were not on track to graduate. Attendance for both students and teachers was abysmal. In prior coaching sessions, she had done some root cause analysis with her coach and determined that attendance was an important place to

intervene. If she could boost attendance, it would be an important first step toward raising student performance.

The coach had given me some background information on the principal before we met with her together. She was organized. She was courageous. She was fierce. She was committed to making a difference in her new assignment. She was very quick to determine “solutions,” at times prior to fully exploring the “problem.” She was working around the clock and was tired. She did not trust many staff members. She was developing trusting relationships with individual students and often aligning herself with them in their struggles with teachers. Her teachers seemed to fear her.

The coach was concerned that this principal was making a common rookie misstep—rather than figuring out how to collaborate with the teaching staff, this principal was trying to work directly with students and fix the problems herself. Such strategies, this coach knew, might have some personally gratifying short-term wins for the principal, but it was not a sustainable solution that engaged or affected the system dynamics of the school. Without teacher engagement in the improvement efforts, very little improvement was likely to happen. The coach felt he had diagnosed the situation fairly, but was struggling to figure out how to move the thinking and behavior of the principal. He had great respect for her, and felt that any challenge to her approach might seem like a betrayal, as she was bombarded with what she perceived to be resistance from her staff and pressure from her supervisors. Finding the space in which she felt fully supported yet pushed to grow had been a challenge.

The three of us sat around a table to discuss the school’s attendance policies and practices. The principal started by explaining that since the last coaching session, she had learned that part of the attendance problem was not actually attendance, but rather how the school was taking attendance.

She started with, “Last time you were here you said ‘go deeper into the problem.’ So I did. And guess what? The teachers aren’t taking attendance right.” The coach started in, “What do you mean by ‘right’?” The principal’s frustration with her situation was evident: “I mean that they mark kids absent, and then I see the same kids here.” The coach continued, “Why do you think that is?” The principal replied, “Because they don’t seem to care.” The coach glanced at me and continued, “Why do you think they don’t care?” The principal looked at him squarely and said, “Because if they cared, they would get it right.” Struggling for the next question to ask, the coach looked at me and said, “Ok, this is where I get stuck.” To which I asked the principal, “What is the actual system for taking attendance?”

The ensuing conversation revealed general confusion about the school’s attendance-taking practices. The principal described a system that was not consistent between teachers, a system that suggested that accuracy did not matter, a system that she inherited from her predecessor. Without an advisory program in place, attendance had been a task assigned to the third-period teachers, but not all students had a third-period class. “So,” I asked, “who is this attendance system good for?” The coach and principal answered in unison: “Nobody.” By delving deeper into the problem, the principal and coach explored how even the most caring

of teachers would likely not get the attendance of students without a third-period class right, and that an important first step was to determine a more reliable system that was more workable into the school day. Instituting an advisory program was a longer-term goal of the principal's; she was not sure how to solve the short-term problem. She realized that given how differently this school was organized from her prior school, she felt lacking in options that might work here. The coach saw an opportunity: "Who could help you figure out what might work here?" The principal saw the same opportunity. "The teachers," she replied.

Coaching is a powerful tool for supporting principals, particularly early in their careers. By asking questions that help leaders delve deeper into the challenges they encounter, by exposing their assumptions, and by supporting them through their growth, coaches provide an important service to school systems faced with leadership turnover at the school level. This guide shares the learning accumulated over nearly a decade of work at NYC Leadership Academy. The work of coaching has evolved over time, in both content and structure, from a loosely organized group of sitting and retired principals imparting wisdom, to a highly trained cadre of veteran leaders deeply committed to continuous learning and honing of their coaching practice. In the course of NYC Leadership Academy's experience, we have coached more than 1,600 new principals, many of whom have requested continued coaching year after year.

Coaching is not about filling the voids and deficits assumed to be part and parcel of a new job. It is about developing a professional practice of action and reflection, of probing current systems

and exploring possibilities. While much of our coaching focuses on early-career principals in New York City, we believe that coaching is a broader and more flexible support that can be useful for leaders facing different challenges: principals placed in turnaround schools and principals working to develop the capacity of leadership teams.

Leadership coaching is an investment that many districts and states are now making in order to address the challenges of higher principal turnover rates in the context of policies geared toward principal accountability. In the context of that pressure, coaching is important support.

The work of coaching is individualized, but not on behalf of the individual. The ultimate beneficiary of leadership coaching is intended to be the school-age students reliant on effective leadership. The coaching process is creative, responsive, and geared toward building a leader's capacity for making change, for improving processes, and ultimately for coaching others.

The pages that follow explore and explain NYC Leadership Academy's approach to coaching. It is our hope that system leaders, coaches, and principals use the information here to create more sustainable systems for leadership support, ultimately benefiting the students we collectively serve.

Sandra J. Stein
Former CEO of NYC Leadership Academy
July 2015



JPG Photography

OUR VISION FOR IMPACT

Since our founding, NYC Leadership Academy (NYCLA) has been committed to improving outcomes nationwide, particularly for the most vulnerable students, through high-quality school leadership. We do this by building the capacity of education systems across the country to develop and support their own leaders, bringing a standards-based and social justice-rooted approach to school leadership development to support our country's most underserved students. The future of education requires well-trained leaders who can improve the achievement of students who need it most—leaders with a sense of urgency and commitment to all students, who can build and lead effective school teams. We are dedicated to the ongoing development of such leaders.

To learn more about our work, including our preparation of aspiring principals, coaching and support for current principals, and school leadership consulting across the country, please visit our website at www.nycleadershipacademy.org.



©Jerry Speier, 2012

99% of NYCLA-coached principals in New York City report that coaching improved their leadership practice.

AN OVERVIEW OF OUR COACHING WORK

School leadership is second only to teaching among school factors that impact student success,¹ and is therefore critical for states and districts to get right. And because the impact of leadership is greatest in schools with the greatest needs,² NYCLA is committed to improving school leadership on behalf of the most vulnerable students.

A highly effective principal has been shown to increase his or her students' standardized test scores up to 10 percentile points in just one year.³ Under effective principals, ineffective teachers tend to leave of their own accord, and effective principals are more likely to hire and retain more effective teachers.⁴

School leadership, then, is a crucial lever for achieving change in education. As principals have been given more control over factors influencing their schools, their job descriptions have transitioned from building management to encompassing the complex work of change, including leading instruction, impacting school culture, managing resources, and evaluating teachers.

THE CASE FOR COACHING

The 2012 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, which includes a survey of principals nationwide, found that 75% of principals agree that their jobs have become too complex.⁵

This view was shared by principals across demographics such as school level, location, and proportion of low-income and minority students.

We believe that school leadership coaching is the best tool to help principals navigate this critical, complex work.

"COACHING" VS. "MENTORING"

There is wide variation in the use of the term "coaching" versus "mentoring" across the field to refer to the work of supporting school leaders. For the purpose of this guide, "coaching" refers to the practice of building the leadership practice, skills, and behaviors of school leaders, ultimately to create a change in outcomes for students in schools. Our work often comprises a one-on-one coaching relationship, but our coaches have also done this work with school leadership teams and in other group settings. Other programs may refer to this same type of work as "mentoring."

The principals we coach experience daily the old adage that “it’s lonely at the top.” And while coaching is not about providing a “friend” to a principal, it is about providing a thought partner in the field. Principals hold teachers and school staff accountable, just as principals themselves are held accountable according to an increasingly stringent set of metrics. Coaching is about providing a principal with the support he/she needs to make necessary leadership behavior changes on behalf of schools and students.

While no one has yet produced research directly linking principal coaching to student outcomes, we know from our own practice that the school leaders we work with value their coaching experience highly. They value coaching not just

as a series of feel-good conversations, but as a tool that positively impacts their leadership practice. Last year in New York City, 92% of the 400 principals we coached agreed that coaching has led to improvements in classroom instruction in their schools. Ninety-five percent agreed that coaching has led to improvements in their ability to develop the capacity of others, and 94% agreed that coaching has led to improvements in school culture.

In addition to data about principal satisfaction with coaching, research has shown that job-embedded learning is the most effective way for adults to gain new skills and knowledge, and that contextualized, targeted coaching support can impact principal practice.⁶

COACHING FOR REFLECTION AND FOR ACTION

“As coaches, we want principals to develop a reflective disposition. This is not only for their own learning but also because the reality is that schools are political institutions and leaders need to be able to consider issues from a variety of perspectives and understand the implications of their decisions at the systems level. The best leaders routinely step back and take into account different points of view. But reflection is not enough. Principals also need to act in a timely way and communicate their decisions effectively to a wide range of stakeholders. The fact is that the work can be anxiety producing, but we are there to help principals identify root causes of problems, think through the implications of their actions, and take the steps needed to build support and capacity of others in the school. We must be willing to push principals out of their comfort zone. Once they build their sense of self-accountability and commitment to change, they become more willing to make appropriate changes on behalf of student learning.”

—Mark Levine, Coach
NYC Leadership Academy

515 coaches have been trained in our facilitative, competency-based coaching model.

WHAT IS COACHING?

In talking about NYCLA's coaching model, it's important to begin with what coaching is not.

- Coaching is **not** about a coach directing the principal to take certain actions.
- Coaching is **not** a therapy session, nor a chance for the principal to talk about whatever is on his/her mind.
- Coaching is **not** about providing a friend in the field whose main purpose is to make principals feel better.

Rather, in our model:

- Coaching is primarily facilitative; coaches create an environment in which the principal engages in critical and targeted reflection on his/her practice, with the goal of facilitating the paradigm or behavioral shifts necessary for the principal to develop his/her leadership capacity.
- Coaching is based on clear leadership competencies intended to build the leadership practice, skills, and behaviors of school leaders, ultimately in the service of changing outcomes for students.
- Coaching is providing principals with a critical thought partner who can create a space for the principal to be reflective about his/her own behaviors and decision-making and can push the principal's thinking.
- Coaching is an iterative process—as principals grow in capacity, engaging with their coach continues to move their leadership practice forward in order to move the school where it needs to go.

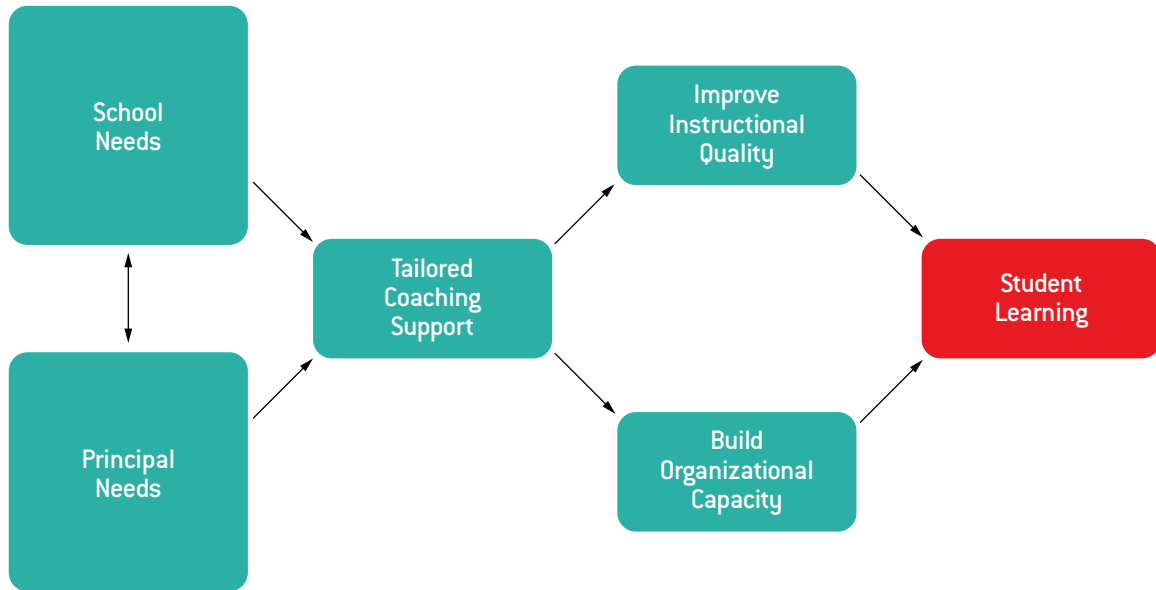


We believe that through coaching, principals can lead instructional and cultural change in their schools. Equity is a foundational value in our approach, embedded in all our work. Coaches are committed to their work with principals not for the principals' sake, but on behalf of students.

In our model, two drivers shape what coaching practice looks like in the field:

1. The school's needs. Coaching is grounded in what needs to happen at the school level. What are the goals that the principal and the school are working toward? These goals are informed by, among other things, student achievement data, the current level of instruction, and the state of the school's culture.

2. The principal's leadership needs. All coaching work starts with the question, what does the principal need to know and be able to do in order to move the school closer to its goals? Leadership needs are diagnosed against specific leadership competencies, discussed in the next section.



Our coaches support the principal in making changes in instructional quality and organizational capacity at the school level. These two elements drive change that impacts students.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide is a call to invest in school leadership differently and better. Principals are being held accountable for more aspects of impacting student outcomes than ever before, and they deserve the best possible support to help them succeed.

This guide shares our experience developing our coaching model, including our use of leadership standards, our approach to coaching, and the purposeful decisions we've made around program design, ongoing coach development, and program evaluation.

Our aim is to unpack our own thinking and intentionality about the decisions we've made and why we've made them. We provide an in-depth

look at the core elements of our approach to coaching, including our lessons learned and the questions we are still asking ourselves about how to coach more effectively.

- **Existing principal coaching programs** can explore our coaching model—including the foundation of standards, our facilitative, competency-based approach, and program design—to spark ideas for ways to strengthen their practice.
- **New principal support programs** in districts, states, and organizations can use this guide to develop the most appropriate coaching solutions for their local needs.
- **District leaders** may consider how current school leadership support is being handled, and decide how desired outcomes can be better met to reduce principal turnover and improve principal effectiveness.
- **State policymakers** can incorporate lessons learned regarding the value of investing in job-embedded, standards-based coaching support for school leaders as they devise policy responses to the challenge of supporting principals to become more effective.

INSIDE A COACHING SESSION: UNPACKING RIGOR

Kate, an experienced coach, has been working with an early-career principal, Julia, on conducting observations using the Danielson Framework and engaging in role plays to build Julia's confidence as a leader.

During a recent coaching session, aligned to their ongoing work, Kate leveraged feedback that Julia received from her superintendent as the springboard for a rich conversation about rigor.

Kate began the session by asking Julia to share her definition of rigor and her vision for how increased rigor would manifest in the classroom—what would look and sound different? Kate helped Julia clarify for herself what she actually meant by “rigor.” When Julia struggled to articulate her ideas, Kate asked her to write down some thoughts and then share them instead of doing the thinking for her.

Once Julia was able to articulate her ideas clearly, Kate had Julia translate her ideas into a set of expectations for teachers. Julia honed in on student engagement and questioning. Kate then asked Julia to practice communicating those expectations. Julia talked about differentiating very purposefully and finding just the right opportunity to stretch each and every student. Kate linked this to Julia's own practice, asking, “How have you used rigor in your observations of teachers—how are you pushing each one of them?” Kate then asked Julia to role-play a feedback conversation. Kate started out playing the part of the teacher but later switched roles with Julia in order to model.

Next, Kate led Julia in a gap analysis between current and desired states of teacher practice in the areas of student engagement and questioning. Finally, she pushed Julia to identify what she would need to do differently in terms of her own leadership and her approach to developing staff in order to effect the changes she desired. Kate's questions were intended to produce next steps, including milestones and evidence: “What do tasks look like now?” “What do you want them to look like?” “When would you want to see this by?” “What are some of the things you need to do first?” After they had spoken specifically about questioning, student engagement, and checking for understanding, Kate asked Julia to consider who she had on staff that could engage in the development work with her.

Kate brought the conversation full circle by returning the focus to Julia. “What will you do differently as a result of this conversation? What will your next steps be?”



COACHING ALIGNED TO LEADERSHIP STANDARDS

Commitment to a standards-based approach to leadership development is a hallmark of NYCLA's work. Our coaching work is mapped to a codified definition of leadership.

Our leadership standards for principals are comprised of eight dimensions:

- 1) Personal Behavior**
- 2) Resilience**
- 3) Communication**
- 4) Student Performance**
- 5) Situational Problem Solving**
- 6) Learning**
- 7) Supervision of Staff**
- 8) Management**

These eight leadership dimensions distill the most critical leadership competencies for school leaders, and were developed in consultation with The Wallace Foundation and the state education departments of Delaware, Missouri, and Kentucky. They reflect a thorough review and synthesis of principal leadership standards used nationally, and are grounded in the belief that focused work on a subset of clearly defined leadership competencies helps school leaders promote student success.

Our leadership standards (or competencies) are codified in a tool called the Leadership Performance Planning Worksheet® (LPPW). The tool makes the competencies actionable by articulating a set of observable behaviors for each leadership dimension.

The LPPW was pilot tested with principals and coaches in almost 1,000 schools in urban, rural, and suburban school districts across seven states. Regardless of geography, demographics, or school setting, the leadership behaviors resonated with pilot users as essential to principal success.

Many of the districts and states we've worked with across the country around school leadership coaching use the LPPW; we typically help them crosswalk the LPPW against the local school leadership performance standards, making adjustments where necessary. The core idea is that coaching needs to be anchored in a standards-aligned, contextually relevant competency framework that identifies what principals need to know and be able to do to raise achievement for all students. All aspects of the work are aligned to a description of competencies, which involves knowledge, a set of skills, and dispositions. The anchoring competencies inform the coaching strategies that hone the skills of school leaders.

The goals of the LPPW are to ground the coaching relationship in concrete skill and knowledge development; to give coaches and principals a common language; and to provide a roadmap for coaching support. The LPPW standards are unique in that they are articulated in very specific behavioral terms, describing the actions of effec-

tive school leaders. These actions include skills such as managing ambiguity, solving problems, implementing action plans, and conducting difficult conversations.

The LPPW identifies core behaviors critical to each of the eight leadership dimensions. These core behaviors address the day-to-day challenges of school leadership.

LPPW DIMENSION 3.0: COMMUNICATION

LEADERSHIP DIMENSION	BEHAVIORS THAT MEET THE STANDARD	PROGRESS UPDATE
<p>3.1 Communicates in ways that reflect analysis and the ability to listen</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Meets Standard</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Approaches Standard</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader’s communication is clear and appropriate for each audience and matches media with message. • Leader understands cultural patterns and adjusts his/her communication style accordingly. • Leader attends and responds to subtle nonverbal cues in others. • Leader consistently checks for mutual understanding. • Leader does not avoid difficult issues, he/she deals with them honestly and directly by using low-interference data and providing examples. • Leader actively pursues disconfirming evidence when drawing conclusions. 	<p>Progress update</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>Area for Improvement</p>
<p>3.2 Promotes the success of all students through consistently direct communication with students and by understanding and responding to their broader political, socio-economic and cultural contexts.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Meets Standard</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Approaches Standard</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader interacts with student body on a consistent basis. • Leader models behavior for staff and encourages staff to engage in purposeful solicitation of student ideas regarding successful classroom approaches to teaching and learning. 	<p>Area for Improvement</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>3.3 Collaborates with Staff</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Meets Standard</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Approaches Standard</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders know all staff members and publicly acknowledges individual contributions • Leader models, encourages, and reinforces efficacy in individuals to produce results and persevere even when internal and external difficulties interfere with the achievement of strategic goals. • Leader generates a sense of urgency by aligning the energy of others in pursuit of strategic goals. 	<p>Next Steps</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

LPPW DIMENSION 3.0: COMMUNICATION

LEADERSHIP DIMENSION

BEHAVIORS THAT MEET THE STANDARD

PROGRESS UPDATE

3.4 Collaboration with families and community

- Meets Standard
- Approaches Standard

- Leader establishes interaction with families and community members.
- Leader develops clear process for gathering and transmitting information from and to families, with awareness of what families in the community do and do not do have access to, in terms of electronic communication.
- Leader is able to identify all stakeholders involved in the school.
- Leader’s presentations to parents and community members are organized and logical, include analysis, and are delivered in an engaging and dynamic style.
- Leader provide clear, specific responses to questions.
- Leader accords individuals consistent amount of attention, time, and respect.
- Leader demonstrates awareness of the public and political nature of his/her position, and applies explicit process for engaging public in controversial issues.

Progress update

Area for Improvement

3.5 Appreciates rituals and routines as enablers of vision.

- Meets Standard
- Approaches Standard

- Leader develops consistent patterns of rituals and routines, and understands how they enable the leader’s vision and strategic priorities.
- Leader understands and honors the organization’s existing culture of rituals and routines.
- Leader has clearly established boundaries for behavior that are considered fixed and immovable.

Next Steps

COACHING TO PERSONAL BEHAVIOR

The principal is in her second year of the principalship of a large, comprehensive high school. The school is considered a failing school by the state and by the city. The District Superintendent has informed the principal that the school must improve and that she has been hired to be a change agent.

She and her coach have agreed to work on dimension 1.0, Personal Behavior. After observing a school leadership team meeting, the coach decides to focus the coaching session on 1.4 (“values different points of view within the organization”).

Principal: Well, what did you think of the meeting? I did my best, but you see how my staff is—they either don’t engage or they’re combative.

Coach: Well, what was the purpose of today’s cabinet meeting?

Principal: To work on our grading policy.

Coach: Did members of the cabinet have an opportunity to suggest items for the agenda?

Principal: I really don’t have time for that. I have too many administrative items to get through.

Coach: Do you think that their recommendations may help you to think about additional issues that you might need to consider?

Principal: I don’t know. Maybe.

Coach: Who made recommendations related to the grading policy?

Principal: No one. And they won’t back me up or defend the policy either.

Coach: I noted that Ms. Knight began to speak. She was concerned about the policy and you said, “I don’t have time for negativity right now.”

Principal: She’s an obstructionist. I can never get anything positive out of her.

Coach: How do you think the rest of the cabinet interpreted how you handled your interaction with her?

Principal: I shut her down because it was going to be negative talk, and now they understand that I don’t want negativity; I want productivity.

Coach: What other messages might that have sent to the cabinet?

Principal: What are you trying to say?

Coach: I am asking you questions that might make you look at this situation from a different perspective—through the eyes of your cabinet members. I am asking you to look at yourself and think about your personal behavior and the role that behavior might play in the results you are attaining.

LEADERSHIP STANDARDS THAT WORK FOR YOUR CONTEXT

Many states and districts have already endorsed school leadership standards. But if your school system has not, there are several resources to consider, including:

- The **ISLLC** (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium) and the **ELCC** (Educational Leadership Constituent Council) standards outline performance goals for effective leadership.
- A 30-year meta-analysis by McREL (Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning) identifies **21 specific leadership responsibilities** significantly correlated with student achievement.
- The **Vanderbilt Assessment for Leadership in Education** (VAL-ED) is a 360° assessment that outlines learning-centered leadership behaviors that influence teachers, staff, and student achievement.

COACHING IMPROVED MY PRACTICE

“My coach played a huge role in developing my skills. Principals have supervisors to hold them accountable for improved test scores and student outcomes. What they don’t always have is a confidential advisor to give an insider perspective on their day-to-day efforts and actions as a leader. Having someone in the school who can comment on school culture issues and teacher buy-in and other key inputs is enormously helpful. My coach helped me to interpret conversations, notice the behavior of teachers and staff, and evaluate my actions. How did I do leading that faculty meeting? Was I clear in communicating my vision and expectations with those parents? Is my discipline plan working? As a result of those conversations with my coach, I was able to develop new skills and be more attuned to important issues within the school.

“The notion of executive coaching as a way of improving practice is integral to most other industries, yet in education we’ve made it a compliance issue and assigned coaches to only the most struggling leaders. I believe that districts and states need to make coaching for all early-career principals a priority. The joy of good coaching is helping a principal to find creative solutions, push the thinking, and give productive feedback so that that leader builds proficiency and independence.”

—David Weiner, President, Pencil;
former recipient of
NYC Leadership Academy coaching

COACH COMPETENCIES

Just as the LPPW delineates the behaviors of successful principals, our coach competencies define the range of skills, knowledge, and dispositions of successful leadership coaches. The competencies are the foundation for coach development and supervision, defining our

expectations of what coaching should look like in action. Mapping to a coherent set of competencies allows coaches to deepen their practice. The competencies become an engine that drives professional development design, feedback, and coaches' own goal-setting.

ORGANIZATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY	CO-CREATES AN ENVIRONMENT THAT MAXIMIZES LEARNING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligns coaching to the organization's mission, ethics, goals, and practices • Understands that coaching is in service of students, and that school leaders are the intermediary • Ensures coaching is informed by priorities and accountability measures of the district/state • Adheres to organization's policy decisions and rules (e.g., confidentiality) • Publicly presents alignment with organization's values and approach • Adheres to organization's coaching model, anchored in competencies and oriented toward building independence on the part of the coachee • Understands context and political landscape in which coaches and coachees work and alerts program staff when appropriate regarding coachee's status • Prioritizes and maximizes support provided based on needs of school and coachee, as opposed to coach's personal preference • Actively assesses own performance and asks for additional resources when needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets tone for trust and honesty. Creates a safe space that allows for vulnerability and encourages authentic feedback • Establishes clear expectations with coachee regarding the coaching relationship. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work will be based on competencies • Intent will be to challenge coachees within their zone of proximal development • While coaching will always be safe, it may not always feel comfortable • Provides opportunities for self-assessment and reflection • Supports coachees in constructing their own knowledge • Engages coachees in their own learning based on the needs of the school • Draws out coachees' expertise; leverages learning from within coachees • Uses knowledge of adult learning to inform coaching • Provokes and contains anxiety in service of learning • Effectively balances relationship-building with the work

STANCE OF A COACH	DIFFERENTIATES COACHING ALIGNED TO NEEDS OF SCHOOL AND SCHOOL LEADER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possesses awareness of own mental models • Cultivates independence • Demonstrates comfort with being a learner, not an expert • Allows oneself to be vulnerable; is open to feedback • Admits and learns from mistakes • Shares own learning and is transparent about the purpose • Is willing to push learning even when it causes anxiety or discomfort on the part of the coachee • Is willing to push learning even when it causes anxiety and discomfort for self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands and/or is able to employ a variety of skills, techniques, methods, and knowledge, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation • Facilitative coaching, directive coaching • Listening • Questioning • Giving feedback • Modeling • Using role play • Individual coaching, group coaching • Adult learning • Learning styles • Basic educational content knowledge • Identification and accessing of resources • Using low-inference data • Continuously collects evidence and looks for patterns and trends • Continuously diagnoses needs of school and coachee • Establishes and revisits learning goals based on patterns, trends, and diagnosis • Anchors diagnoses, goals, and coaching in competencies • Sets and revisits pacing and sequencing based on goals • Aligns employment of skills, methods, and techniques to learning purpose • Knows when and how to employ outside resources strategically • Connects all coaching moves to purpose

COACHING ACROSS EXPERIENCE LEVELS

Many school districts have decided to focus their coaching efforts on first-year and early-career principals, since supporting those leaders and ensuring their early success has been a critical part of efforts to reduce principal turnover. But recognizing that coaching can be a useful tool then leads to the question: who could benefit most from coaching?

Other districts have seen opportunities to provide coaching to different audiences: to experienced principals who enter turnaround or high-need schools; to new principal and assistant principal teams; or to whole school leadership teams.

The benefits of coaching don't disappear after a principal's first year on the job. The School Leaders Network's recent report, *Churn*, demonstrates the high cost of principal burnout, estimating that new principals cost their districts an average of \$75,000 to prepare and onboard. Since 25,000 principals leave their schools each year, the turnover cost to districts is extremely high. One of the four solutions they propose to increase principal retention is to "provide one-to-one coaching support to principals beyond the first two years."⁷

Likewise, The Wallace Foundation noted that coaching "is an important layer of support to offer... and one that is too important to remove past a principal's first year." It recommends that all districts should provide coaching for all principals for a minimum of their first three years on the job, and longer for those who are struggling.⁸

While the practice of principal coaching has often focused on early-career school leaders, coaches can continue to support principals' leadership growth over the longer term. In other industries, coaching for experienced managers and leaders is a broadly accepted part of providing support for individual and organizational growth.

According to a recent McKinsey survey, coaching is the third most utilized practice for developing organizational capacity, behind on-the-job training and one-time internal courses. Thirty-three percent of surveyed companies report using coaching extensively, and that number jumps to 60% when looking at only the most effective companies.⁹ Coaching is often a crucial mechanism for leaders to receive direct, honest feedback, especially at the senior leadership level. In addition, long-term executives and CEOs frequently use coaches when they want to hone a specific leadership skill, begin work toward a particularly challenging goal, or need a fresh perspective on their leadership.

NYCLA'S APPROACH TO COACHING

The goal of our coaching work is not to give answers or provide solutions to the problem at hand, but to build the principal's skills and knowledge so that he/she can apply these to current and future leadership situations.

A FACILITATIVE, COMPETENCY BASED APPROACH

Facilitative, competency-based coaching is an approach to school leadership development in which two people (coach and principal) work together around an agreed-upon set of competencies (skills, knowledge, and behaviors). The coach creates an environment in which the principal engages in critical and targeted reflection on his/her practice as it relates to the competencies with the goal of facilitating the paradigm or behavioral shifts necessary for the principal to develop his/her leadership capacity.

Many coaching approaches recognize the facilitative / directive continuum. For example, The New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz promotes a Blended Coaching model, which combines facilitative and directive elements.¹⁰

In our definition of "facilitative," the coach helps the principal to objectively observe his/her practice, draws out ideas and possible solutions, and lets the principal come to his/her own decisions.

Our coaches adopt a more directive stance when appropriate, giving direct information or advice, suggesting the correct course of action, and offering solutions. Of course, any time a principal is not in compliance with regulations or if there are legal or child safety issues at stake, it is the coach's job to intervene and give the principal the information or knowledge he/she needs to act appropriately. A directive coaching strategy may also be the best approach if a principal is lacking key information or working with time constraints. A coach can later choose to revisit any situation in which he/she adopted a directive stance to provide the principal with opportunities for reflection and learning.

Principals have complex, time-consuming jobs. One of the coach's responsibilities is to facilitate reflection, to create space for the principal to pause and reflect on the effectiveness of his/

NYCLA has worked in partnership with state and local school systems, universities and other forward-thinking non-profit organizations across

26

states including four states in the federal Race to the Top program



©Jerry Speier, 2012

her behaviors on him/herself and the school, and how he/she can improve to help move the school closer to its goals.

Coaches also utilize reflective practice as an entry point into working with leadership competencies, creating a space in which the principal engages in critical and targeted reflection on his/her practice in each dimension. The coach's goal is to facilitate the paradigm or behavioral shifts necessary for the principal to develop his/her leadership capacity.

In addition to reflecting on leadership practice, coaches also work with principals to reflect on the underlying structures and changes that are

needed in a school to truly change the system in which the school operates. Working with the tenets of systems thinking, which explores the interconnections between various aspects of a complex system, allows the principal and coach to view the school as both a system in itself and as part of a larger societal system.¹¹ Principals observe the dynamic nature of interrelated parts and determine how and where to intervene to influence change. For example, if a principal is focused on improving school culture by reaching out to parents, but his/her interventions aren't producing the anticipated results, the coach would push the principal to understand the structures underlying this problem and think more strategically about how and where to intervene.

NYCLA'S BELIEFS ABOUT ADULT LEARNING

Our approach to coaching work, as well as our work on principal preparation and professional development for current school leaders and principal supervisors, is based on our beliefs about adult learning,¹² which are rooted in research about how adults learn best. The foundation of our work with adults includes the beliefs that:

- **Adults learn most deeply from experience and reflection.** Adults learn best when learning is active, hands-on, and relevant to their lives. School leaders learn best when offered engaging, authentic opportunities to develop the competencies they need and to practice the work while shifting their own behavior. Reflecting on these experiences deepens the learning process and supports learners as self-reflective, self-directed, and empowered adults.
- **Learning is a social process.** The process of learning is in fact the collaborative construction of more insightful, more complex meaning than one could construct on one's own, and as Vygotsky (1978) points out, can most meaningfully be assessed not based on individual performance, but instead on what one can learn in conversation and collaboration with others. Working with thought partners and groups provides opportunities to increase individual and system-wide knowledge.
- **Adults have a high capacity to learn from the discomfort inherent in moving from the known to the unknown and in taking risks.** Authentic learning is a process of moving from the known to the unknown and thus causes anxiety. With supports, such as feedback, tools for managing stress, and reassurance that they are not expected to “get it right” the first time—that in fact “mistakes” and “failure” are expected and to be learned from—adults learn from risk and discomfort, motivated by the knowledge that skills they learn will contribute to their professional growth.
- **Adults learn by creating and revising stories in order to make meaning.** A central job of humans is to make meaning. Through a largely unconscious process, people make meaning by experiencing and observing their environment, by selecting particular data from that environment, and by constructing a narrative or story that explains the relationship between otherwise disparate pieces of data. An adult's learning is furthered and demonstrated by the capacity to see the stories of others as valid, or to understand the logic upon which they were constructed, and by the ability to revise one's own stories.
- **Adults learn best in an environment of structured freedom.** Adults learn best from questions and activities that are structured enough to provide an edge against which to define ideas, but that capture the complexity of real life and are thus open to a multiplicity of answers and solutions.



COACHING TOOLKIT

Based on our facilitative, competency-based approach to coaching, which is rooted in our beliefs about how adults learn best, coaches employ a variety of techniques when working with principals. These tools are used in conjunction with one another and adapted to the context of the school, the principal's learning needs, and the relationship between the coach and the principal.

Low-inference data is factual, observable information—information that we can see and hear, without the interference of our interpretation, subjectivity, or assumptions. Low-inference data is a critical component of collecting evidence in order to understand what is really happening, not what one thinks is happening.

We coach **34%** of
early-career principals (2-5 years) in
NYC public schools

USING LOW INFERENCE DATA IN COACHING

A focus on low-inference data—what one sees and hears—disciplines principals and coaches in the examination of facts that are rooted in what is actually going on in the school and not in their assumptions or inferences.

High-inference data, in contrast, is data to which one has added judgments or assumptions. High-inference data is described with subjective adjectives or qualifying language. Often, one may describe data with a non-judgmental tone, but use a seemingly innocuous or positive-sounding word to judge what they have seen (e.g., “The teacher is organized”). This is not low-inference because the observer has drawn a conclusion that the teacher’s files are organized without detailing what he/she has seen that indicates this. A low-inference example is, “On a steel table in the front of the room, the teacher placed a green folder for homework from Class 01, a red folder for Class 02, and a blue folder for Class 03. The teacher labels each class’s homework in these respective colors on the whiteboard in the front of the classroom.”

Low-inference observations are detailed transcriptions of what took place. They are an accurate record of what a principal actually said and did and what teachers or students actually said and did.

During coaching visits, coaches conduct regular classroom, cafeteria, schoolyard, and hallway observations with the principal. This practice allows the coach to see the principal in action and understand how he/she takes in information and makes sense of it. Part of the coach’s job is to help the principal to recognize how he/she gathers data, detects trends and patterns, and makes connections. For example, if a coach notices a concerning pattern in a teaching practice, he or she might ask a series of questions about the principal’s observations to see if the principal picked up on the same pattern. The coach might explore the principal’s interpretation of the pattern and the implications. The goal of these conversations is to help the principal understand his/her own lens as a leader and to take a systems view when determining how and where to best influence change. Low-inference transcripts are one tool the coach uses to help accomplish this goal.

Listening is an often-overlooked skill. Effective listening requires active, ongoing engagement in order to gather information, gain a deeper understanding of the school leader, check for understanding, identify possible leverage points for growth, and determine next steps for the coaching relationship. Effective coaches are patient, open, and non-judgmental in order to ensure the authenticity of their observations and understanding.

Questioning techniques and strategies can be employed by the coach for different purposes: to gather data and information and to push the principal to construct his/her own meaning of situations, identify problems and dilemmas, provide feedback, and promote ownership of learning. Questioning moves the coach away from telling, explaining, or relating his/her own beliefs, judgments, and experiences toward supporting the principal's development as an independent leader. Questioning is one of the coach's key teaching and learning tools. Questioning skills are designed to "push the thinking" of the principal, rather than any specific thought.

Mental models are defined by Peter Senge as "images, assumptions, and stories that we carry in our minds of ourselves, other people, institutions, and every aspect of the world."¹³ They may loosely be referred to as our prejudices. They serve as a filter that determines what we actually see and shape how we act. Coaches help principals to uncover their own mental models and to observe how their mental models affect their behaviors.

Role play allows the principal to practice competencies, such as communication, in a low-stakes environment. Role play allows the principal to practice a leadership stance, to prepare for difficult conversations, or to "get behind the eyes" of another person such as a teacher, staff member, parent, or student.

Feedback is an ongoing, dynamic process and reflects a clear investment on the part of both the coach and principal in the work of focused school/district improvement, learning, performance, and growth. The coach uses leadership competencies from the LPPW to give feedback that helps advance the work of the principal. Coaches provide feedback that is objective (rooted in low-inference data), useful, strategic, timely, and honest.

NYCLA has trained and strategically

supported nearly **450**
district leaders, coaches and
other school leadership professionals
in our school leadership
development model

INSIDE A COACHING SESSION: PROVIDING USEFUL FEEDBACK

Kendra, a NYCLA coach, was working with Jean, a new principal who was working on impacting her school's culture. Jean had instituted an open door policy to free up communication lines with the staff and begin to build trust. A few months into the school year, Jean was growing frustrated that people weren't dropping in to talk with her.

Kendra shared some feedback with Jean about the open door policy. Kendra had observed Jean inviting staff members to drop by her office on several occasions. However, Kendra had once visited without an appointment, and had noticed that Jean was distracted for the duration of her visit. Jean had said that she was happy to see Kendra, but didn't get up from her desk. Jean had also glanced at her computer periodically during their conversation. Kendra told Jean that she'd observed similar patterns when two other teachers had dropped in unannounced.

Jean received this feedback and discussed with Kendra what she could do to make people feel more welcome, including offering coffee, having a comfortable area in which to sit, and giving the visitor her full attention. They also discussed the drawbacks of an open door policy and possible alternatives.

After this feedback and conversation, Jean decided to continue her open door policy, but changed the way she put it into practice. She began making an effort to engage with visitors when they dropped in and set up an area in her office that would be more comfortable for informal conversation. She also made a plan for visitors who arrived when she was in the middle of important work: she would get up from her desk, thank them for dropping by, and ask if they could schedule a meeting later in the week.

INSIDE A COACHING SESSION: NAILING DOWN OPERATIONS AND GIVING TEACHERS FEEDBACK

Kevin is the first-year principal of a brand-new school. Because he is the sole administrator in his building, his coach, Donna, typically uses a portion of each visit to cover operational content. She also is working with him on giving formal, evaluative feedback to teachers.

Donna purposely scheduled her visit to coincide with a fire drill, so she spent the first part of the visit debriefing the school's fire drill process. She asked questions such as, "Did you have anyone sweeping the floor?" She also made suggestions and pointed out where Kevin's process needed improvement. "One of the procedures if you have someone in the holding room is to call on the radio to confirm that they are there."

Donna's stance during the operational piece of the visit was more directive, but she shifted her demeanor as she moved into the next phase of the coaching session. One of Donna's main objectives for the second part of the visit was to push Kevin on his reluctance to initiate work on the new district teacher evaluation system.

Donna had noticed, through low-inference observation of him throughout the first part of that year, that Kevin valued his staff and was protective of them. At the same time, she had also seen that he was clearly invested in his students. When Kevin expressed that he didn't want to ask too much of his teachers too soon, Donna saw an opportunity to create cognitive dissonance by forcing Kevin to acknowledge where those values might conflict. She asked him, "Do you expect that the instruction your sixth graders have received so far this year is at a level that will allow them to progress?" Kevin became quieter, then said, "A lot of the teachers here have come a long way. I want them to feel supported."

Donna validated this but did not let the issue go. She replied, "You need to have two things happening. You want your teachers to develop according to the teacher evaluation standards, and the children also have to be learning."

As they continued to talk, Donna continued to push back on Kevin's resistance to giving formal feedback. It came to light that Kevin has been giving his teachers informal feedback but not aligning it to the evaluation rubric. Donna asked, "How do you think they will feel in January when they have had their first round of feedback aligned to the rubric?"

Donna helped Kevin think about how he could mitigate his teachers' anxiety while still holding them accountable. What words of reassurance could Kevin use to express his expectations and what resources might he provide? She also pushed him to create a plan to introduce the new teacher evaluation rubric and to begin giving formal feedback aligned to it. Donna and Kevin then visited several classrooms together.

USING STANDARDS TO GUIDE COACHING

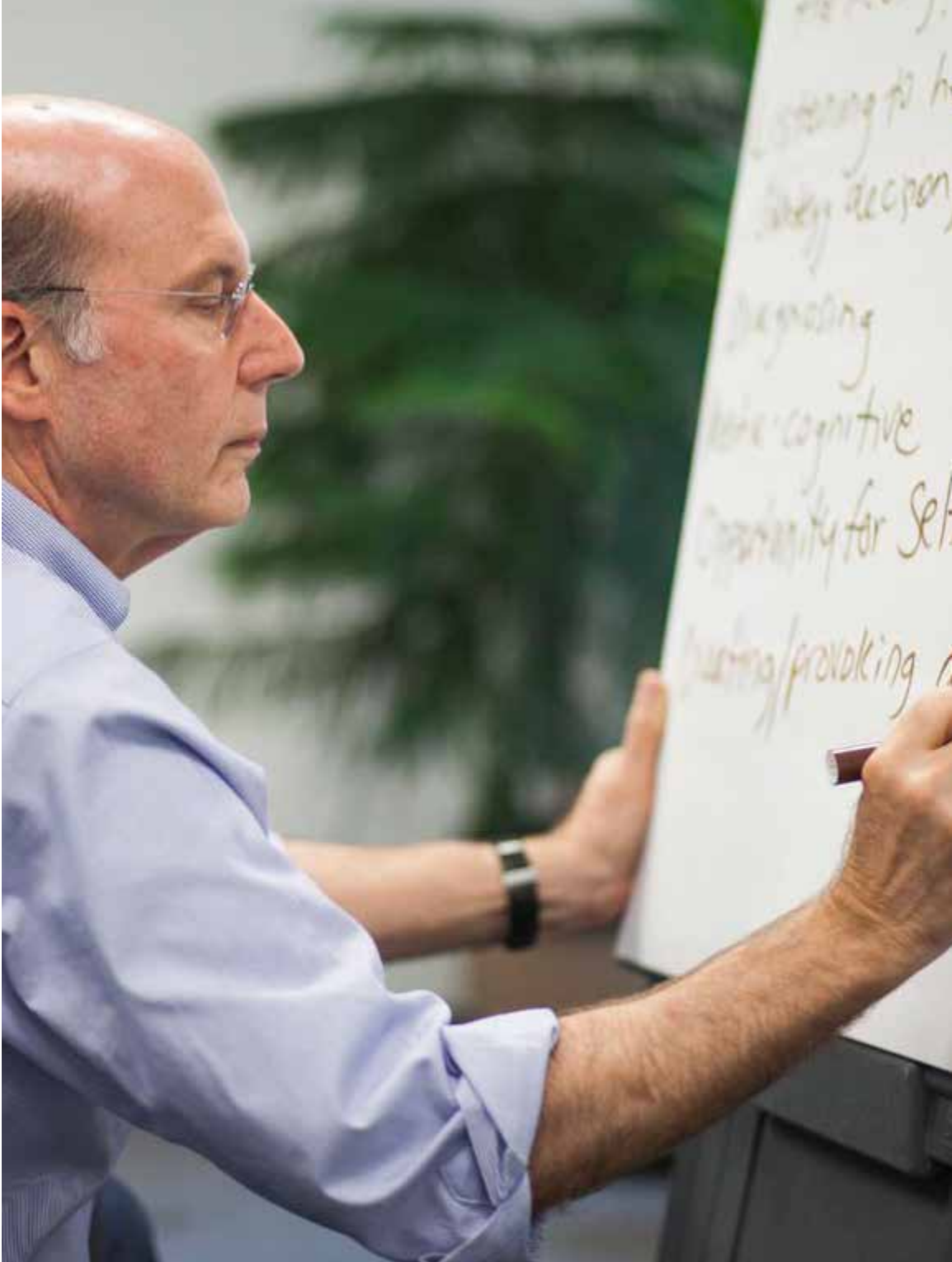
“As coaches, we must constantly be collecting evidence and monitoring the behaviors and actions of the principal in relation to the standards. We are consistently alternating between gathering data and diagnosing school-level issues, on the one hand, and then using school challenges and needs as opportunities to develop the skills and competencies of the principal. This continual loop relies on building walk-throughs, classroom observations, and other informal and formal data gathering to assemble evidence of principal movement after the coaching. We use our findings to guide the principal in reflective discussions about his/her understanding of key issues, the assumptions made, actions taken, and why. It all cycles back to the LPPW standards.”

—Kevin McCormack, Coach
NYC Leadership Academy

INCREASING THE PRINCIPAL'S LEARNING CURVE

“When I was appointed as new principal of a turnaround school, I was thankful that I was assigned an experienced coach to work with me. My coach kept me focused on my top priorities and moving toward my goals for the school. It is very easy to get taken off track by minor crises and daily distractions. My coach helped me steer the work and be systematic about my actions. We regularly reviewed school, classroom, teacher, and student data together and I used that information to paint a picture for my staff about where we needed to make changes as a school. Having an experienced practitioner at my side to keep me grounded helped me get results more quickly than I might have on my own. Now, in my role as a superintendent, I help early-career principals to step out of the chaos of the moment and attend to their primary goals of moving the school forward. A good coach can speed the learning curve and with student learning at stake, we have no time to waste.”

—Karen Watts,
Superintendent of Brooklyn High Schools
NYC Department of Education



UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE: ASSESSING CURRENT LEADERSHIP SUPPORTS

We have seen in our work that when districts adopt a comprehensive approach to supporting school leaders, the results can be very powerful. We have seen coaching work most effectively when it works in concert with—rather than isolated from—other leadership supports, such as induction and ongoing professional development.

In our work with districts through our multi-year partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), our coaches' work in schools has given them great insight into where principals need additional support, both in terms of their individual growth areas and system-wide challenges. These patterns and trends of the principals' learning needs have been used to inform the design and delivery of timely and relevant professional development. This feedback loop between principal learning needs, individualized coaching support, and the design of professional development can result in especially powerful learning.

For the past two years we have been offering integrated professional development for RIDE. During the school year we offer professional development sessions (some of which include both principals and a small team from their schools) and 30 hours of coaching for the principal. One mechanism that has made learning so powerful for the school leaders is the feedback loops we've instituted between coaches and professional development facilitators.

Every six weeks the professional development design team meets with the RIDE coaches to find out what is happening at the school level. Where are the principals and their teams experiencing success? Where are they struggling? Facilitators and coaches talk about patterns of principal behavior, team behavior, and the implementation of the work in which the team is supposed to be engaged. Facilitators share the high-level purpose of the upcoming professional development session and solicit coaches' thoughts about how to best address the particular topic.

Patterns emerge: topics related to the cycle of the school year, the political context, the struggle to improve student learning. Principals' needs within the arc of the pattern differ, and facilitators consider how to address the pattern of need while also differentiating appropriately.

These meetings also ensure that we are employing consistent language across these two modes of leadership support.

Finally, each professional development session ends with the team creating a specific next step. This provides a tight follow-up loop for the coach to hold the principal accountable for working with the team to accomplish that next step.

When leadership support services, such as coaching and professional development, are provided by different district offices or organizations, mechanisms can be created to ensure alignment. This could be as simple as a monthly meeting between providers. Ensuring that all providers are on the same page, working toward the district's goals, is essential.

NYCLA coaches average **32** years of experience working with the NYCDOE.



ASSESSING CURRENT LEADERSHIP SUPPORTS

We have developed the school leadership development assessment questions below based on our experience working with more than 20 states and districts to develop and improve principal coaching programs.

These questions are meant to be used not as a one-time diagnostic, but for school systems to continually review school leadership patterns and trends alongside current supports. We hope these assessments will encourage a cycle of reflecting on what does and doesn't work in terms of principal support, and moving forward to solve new problems and meet new challenges.

The questions might frame the agenda for a meeting of a district's Office of School Leadership (or equivalent) to determine what supports might best serve principals for the year ahead. They might enable program managers for new or existing principal coaching programs to talk with district or state offices about program developments or changes. Or they might provide state policymakers with a framework in which to think about leadership support differently.

NYCLA coached **65** principal supervisors for the Los Angeles Unified School District in 2013



EARLY-CAREER SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PATTERNS AND TRENDS

What percentage of current school principals are early-career, with fewer than three years' experience?

How many additional principalships do you anticipate will be filled by novice school leaders in the upcoming school year?

What percentage of schools led by early-career principals are low performing?

In what skills or competency areas are early-career principals struggling? What are their common development needs?

What key district initiatives are being rolled out that require a major leadership role, such as adapting to the use of Common Core standards or a new teacher evaluation system?

What is the turnover rate for early-career principals? Is turnover clustered in certain types of schools (i.e., by grade level, school performance, school demographics)?

What are the top three reasons for principal turnover (e.g., retirements, promotions, job satisfaction, poor performance, state or federal school improvement funding requirements)?

EXISTING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Is there a principal induction program? If so, what does it entail? What, if any, district priorities or initiatives aren't covered?

What, if any, ongoing individualized support exists for new and/or experienced principals? What are the outcomes of this support? How much growth are principals showing and how do you know?

What opportunities exist for new and/or experienced principals to engage in professional development? To what extent do principals find the provided professional development to be useful, engaging, and helpful in moving their practice?

What existing leadership support programs are not meeting district or state goals? How might these programs be repurposed or discontinued in order to create programs that better align with desired objectives?

What patterns and trends are principal supervisors seeing in what new and experienced principals are struggling with? How can the district/state best meet these needs?

EVALUATING EXISTING COACHING PROGRAMS

To what extent is coaching meeting the needs of the state/district for leadership support? Where are there gaps?

To what extent are principals satisfied with the coaching support provided? How do you know? What do principals cite as the most useful part of coaching?

Are coaches expected to serve in an evaluative role with their principals? If so, how is this working? What challenges are arising, if any?

Where can coaching support be strengthened, either by improving the readiness of the coaches themselves or by targeting the focus?

What data is available to measure principal and/or district supervisor perception of coaching impact?

Where are there existing lines in state or district budgets, government grants, or private philanthropy that could be used to revamp or begin a coaching program? How can that funding be made sustainable? What can be done to secure long-term funding streams?

Once these questions are answered, school systems can analyze gaps and evaluate current leadership support, and consider next steps.



© Jerry Speier, 2012

SUSTAINING PRINCIPAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS

In 2012-2013, NYCLA coordinated a professional learning community (PLC) for The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative grantees, focusing on principal mentoring (coaching) programs. The Mentoring PLC included representatives from six school districts: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Denver Public Schools, Gwinnett County Public Schools, Hillsborough County Public Schools, New York City Department of Education, and Prince George's County Public Schools.

At the time, projections indicated that only 55% of principal coaching programs that received earlier Wallace funding would continue past the next two years. Additional anecdotal evidence suggested that since 2008, principal support programs had been downsized or eliminated across the country.¹⁴

The Mentoring PLC decided to focus its work on program sustainability, surveying more than 200 members of Learning Forward and the Southeast Regional Education Board (SREB). Survey results were augmented by 45-minute interviews with 14 coaching program coordinators from nine states. From this data, the Mentoring PLC identified four dimensions that contributed to a coaching program's sustainability:

- Program Operation
- Program Financial Resources
- Mentor / Coach Cadre Management
- Program Evaluation

In short, their findings suggested that sustainability does not solely equal funding. Rather, building a sustainable program requires intentional decision-making about administrative support and program processes to achieve long-term change.

To help make this data actionable for coaching programs across the country, NYCLA created, with support from The Wallace Foundation, a free online tool for principal coaching and mentoring programs called the Program Sustainability Audit and Action Planner (PSAAP) (<http://www.nyclleadershipacademy.org/news-and-resources/tools-and-publications/program-sustainability-audit-and-action-planning-tool>).

The PSAAP is an internal, evidence-based review of a program's sustainability in each of the four key dimensions. Each dimension contains checklists and multiple-choice questions, as well as suggestions for evidence to support internal ratings. The Action Planner then allows teams to choose the dimension with the highest leverage for improvement to plan specific action steps, list resources needed, confront possible obstacles, and share information with other stakeholders. We hope that the PSAAP will enable coaching programs across the country to consider their long-term sustainability from a broader lens.

PROGRAM DESIGN

As stated earlier, our purpose for coaching is to help school leaders build their leadership practice, skills, and behaviors, ultimately to create a change in outcomes for students in schools. All of our programmatic decisions, from selecting and training new coaches, to developing the skills of current coaches, to matching coaches and principals, are mapped to this purpose. This section includes program design options for new and existing programs to consider.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

In our work, we have seen that coaching programs are able to be most successful when purpose drives their program structure. If a program's purpose is to support new principals because too many new leaders in the district are burning out after two years, that purpose will inform structural decisions like audience and staffing.

AUDIENCE

Many states and districts focus their coaching support on early-career principals. This decision allows new principals to work one-on-one with a coach who can serve as an experienced thought partner and guide them in reading the school culture, analyzing a wide range of school data, and focusing on the most important issues. In other contexts, there may be a greater benefit

to having the coach work with a team within the school—the cabinet, school leadership team, assistant principals, or a team of teacher leaders—to build capacity or to strategize as a group on specific projects and goals.

In other contexts where we have worked, coaches have worked across schools with groups of principals. The leader's role can be very isolating, and these principals appreciated the opportunity to connect with others in the same position. In these cases, the coach facilitated a peer coaching model, bringing together a group of principals for discussions about leadership issues. The groups also worked on particular challenges such as implementing new district initiatives or addressing common problems of practice.

Coaching Principals and Teams in Turnaround Schools in Rhode Island

The Rhode Island Department of Education partnered with NYCLA to provide integrated support for **principals** and school teams working in turnaround schools across the state. As discussed earlier, this integrated support includes professional development sessions (some with principals only and some with principals and their teams) and coaching for the principal.

Building leadership capacity across a team of people—rather than just the capacity of the individual principal—allows the work of impacting the school to happen at a deeper level. Effecting change on the system of the school becomes the job of the team, rather than the job of one person. While the entry point into coaching is direct work with the principal, coaching for RIDE focuses more on how the principal is leading his/her team, how he/she is developing team capacity, and how the team is leading turnaround work in the school. The coaching relationship focuses on the data the team is using to inform decision-making, the systems that are in place for the team to work together effectively, and the impact of that work on the goals of the school.

Standardizing Practice and Overcoming Geographical Barriers in Missouri

The state of Missouri requires two years of mentoring (coaching) for all new school principals to help them strengthen leadership skills and professional practice. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education gave feedback on, piloted, and was an early adopter of NYCLA's Leadership Performance Planning Worksheet© (LPPW). While the LPPW provided leadership standards, mentoring was still inconsistent in quality because the state lacked a system of core beliefs on how to best develop principal skills and competencies.

Missouri saw a need to standardize the role of the mentors and establish a cohesive and consistent approach to mentoring. This was particularly challenging for such a large state where it was hard to bring mentors together for regular, in-person training sessions. NYCLA collaborated with Missouri to develop a series of online training modules for their mentors. One set of modules addresses each of the dimensions of the LPPW and the second set addresses key elements of coaching practice, including:

- Exploring the Mentor Relationship
- Planning the Initial School Visit
- Listening and Questioning Skills
- Providing Feedback
- Coaching Strategies

The modules use videos, audio, reflective questions, quizzes, and material downloads to give examples of coaching in action and opportunities for coaches to practice strategies. The modules serve as an important resource for mentors as they hone in on the particular behavioral areas that will support leaders' growth.

To obtain a one-week test account for the Online Coaching Modules, or to purchase access for coaches in your district, please email us at contactus@nycleadershipacademy.org.



© Jerry Speier, 2012

LOCATION

While it may be optimal to have the coach in the school on a regular basis to see the principal in action and provide immediate feedback, this is not always feasible in places where schools are spread far apart or coaches serve large principal caseloads.

To save costs and time, a coach might visit a school only a few times a year and provide the majority of coaching support through a remote solution such as phone, email, Skype, and/or a specialized coaching platform or tool.

In the 2012-13 school year, coached principals served by NYCLA impacted

250,000
students in NYC public schools.

PROGRAM STAFFING

To support and manage our cadre of 25 to 33 full- and part-time coaches and coach specialists, NYCLA employs three full-time program staff who manage the following components of administering the program:

- Coaching work with principals
- Hiring, training, onboarding, and supervising coaches
- Logistics, including coach/principal matching
- Evaluation of coaching practice

Obviously, staffing considerations for coaching programs will be determined by program size and resource availability. Generally, we have seen programs succeed when they have accounted for all the components described above. If these components aren't centered in one department, there must be clear structures for communication and program alignment.

Coached School Team Retreats in Philadelphia

Our coaching work frequently incorporates coach-supported school leadership team retreats. The coach and principal work together to plan these retreats for the principal plus three to four school team members chosen by the principal. The retreats are ideally held off-site, for a half or full day, and the coach is present to provide support.

In our work with the School District of Philadelphia to develop a program for supporting first-year principals, we offered a full-day fall school team retreat, designed and facilitated by NYCLA coaches and facilitators. The purpose of the retreat centered on understanding how high-functioning teams work. The teams were also given ample time during the retreat to put their learning into action by planning for their own school-based work for the year ahead.

Participants delved into the leadership competencies they needed to develop individually and as a team in order to meet their school's goals for the year. Then they reflected on the first round of school data that had just come out and used it as a springboard for discussion about the work needed to be done by the team for the rest of the year, backwards mapping it to pinpoint tasks for each team member for the coming months, weeks, and days.

In the spring, the principals had the opportunity to plan and lead another retreat for their school teams, with the support of the coach, to follow up on teaming skills and additional areas where the team needs to work.

COACH SELECTION

Coaches need to be able to facilitate as well as direct, to build relationships, listen well, question effectively, and pick up on subtle cues. These skills guide our requirements for selecting coaches.

In addition to using our **coach competencies** as a guide to selecting coaches, we also require the following qualifications when hiring coaches for our NYCDOE work:

- Minimum of five years supervisory experience in the NYC public school system
- Evidence of past success as an instructional leader
- Demonstrated ability to develop leadership
- Extensive instructional knowledge and experience
- Expertise in NYCDOE Accountability tools and initiatives

Our selection process is geared both to help candidates experience what it's like to work as a coach and to allow our program team to discern whether candidates possess characteristics of an effective coach.

First, coach applicants submit a written application responding to questions designed to surface indications of the candidate's self-awareness; an ability to be reflective about his/her own practice; willingness to take risks; and familiarity with district initiatives, local accountability measures, and instructional expectations. Program staff review the applications and invite the most promising candidates to a group interview.

The group interview simulates the coaching experience so that staff can see how candidates act and respond when presented with a school challenge. A group of four to seven candidates is

asked to analyze a school scenario to identify underlying patterns and trends and to suggest the coaching strategies they would adopt. Each individual shares his or her thoughts, and the group jointly decides how best to focus the coaching. This exercise helps reveal candidates' ability to pick up on subtle cues, diagnose problems, plan a coaching strategy, interact with others, and reach consensus. Then the candidates take turns playing the role of the coach, after which they get reactions and feedback from their peers. Those candidates who demonstrate the ability to be reflective, accept feedback, and listen to others, among other skills, are invited back for individual interviews as the final step in the hiring process.

The individual interview functions as a follow-up experience to the group interview. Interviewers delve further into the candidate's behavior during the group interview, asking clarifying questions about things the person said or, if necessary, eliciting further thinking about a particular issue.

REPORTING STRUCTURES

CONFIDENTIALITY

Coaching programs must determine the level of confidentiality of a coaching relationship with purpose, and that decision must be shared with coaches and principals in advance of the start of coaching. Will the substance of coaching be confidential, or will a coach be expected to share observations with the principal's supervisor or other district leaders?

An in-between solution is tracking patterns and trends across coached principals and providing a feedback loop to the district that could inform professional development. These considerations depend on a district or state's particular school needs and situations. A district with a high number of turnaround schools may decide that coaches will check in with supervisors to ensure that the principal is making progress, or they may decide that there is enough pressure on the principal without the added layer of their learning process being hindered by too many watching eyes.

In our work with the NYCDOE, what happens within a coaching relationship remains confidential. However, patterns and trends of where principals are struggling and succeeding are sometimes codified and shared with NYCDOE leadership.

COACH ACCOUNTABILITY

If the goal of coaching is to move student achievement—rather than simply hold conversations with the principal on a monthly basis—then a program must identify ways to hold coaches accountable for that goal as much as possible.

NYCLA coaches, like all NYCLA employees, participate in an annual performance appraisal process. Their performance is evaluated based on several factors: whether they delivered the appropriate number of coaching hours to each principal; whether or not they made significant progress toward and/or achieved the goals they set the previous fall; and on the team's observations of the coach's work in the field.

In addition, principals complete a feedback survey each year, which includes components about their satisfaction level with the coaching they received. This provides the Leadership



©Jerry Speier, 2012

Support Program (LSP) team with another source of data about coaches' practice. Did principals feel their leadership practice grew? How much of this growth do they attribute to their coach?

The type of accountability structure matters less than that some type of meaningful structure is established. We expect coaches to impact the practice of principals for the sake of student achievement, and our accountability activities measure the impact on principal behavior to the greatest extent possible.

NYCLA's approach to program evaluation is explored further on page 61.

SUPERVISORS AS COACHES

As we have already noted, coaching principals in isolation is not the point of this work. Rather, coaching school leaders is most powerful within a school system where principal hiring, onboarding, and development processes are consistently aligned with the goal of supporting and enabling principals to impact student achievement.

Thus, it's also important to articulate how principal supervision aligns with principal development and support. Is the principal supervisor responsible for developing the principal's capacity, as well as evaluating him or her? If not, how is the supervisor receiving information about the principal's development? Whatever the modes

of principal support and evaluation, alignment between the two will help the principal further district and school goals.

More attention is being paid of late to the role of the principal supervisor, especially after the release of The Wallace Foundation's recent report, "Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors." As districts think more about developing principals, an increasing number are looking to the principal supervisor role as a place where some—though not necessarily all—of that principal support can live.

Traditionally, a principal supervisor has been tasked with evaluation and oversight of the principal's role. But as the principalship becomes more and more complex, requiring a deep instructional knowledge base and a wide skill set in communication and personal behavior, district leaders are recognizing that evaluation, while crucial, cannot by itself develop leaders. In a district where NYCLA is working with principal supervisors, a deputy superintendent recently noted, "You can't fire your way to success."

This shift to more of a developmental, supervisory stance is causing districts to rethink how they define the principal supervisor role, how they train people in that role, and how they balance the role of coaching and support with that of evaluation and oversight. Districts making this shift to a more supportive definition of the principal supervisor role need to take a deliberate approach to defining what those shifts entail: clarifying the principal supervisor's

job description, creating relevant standards for principal supervisors as leaders of instructional leaders, and evaluating principal supervisors in a meaningful way. Some areas for consideration include:

Clarify job description	What are principal supervisors responsible for? How much time are they expected to spend evaluating principals versus developing them?
Span of control	How many principals does each principal supervisor supervise? Is this span of control reasonable, given changes in the job description?
Skill sets and training	Do current principal supervisors have the skill sets needed to support and develop principals? Has the district normed what principal coaching and support looks like within the principal supervisor role? What skill sets are required when hiring new principal supervisors? What training is needed for principal supervisors to be successful?
Principal supervisor standards and evaluation	Has the district adopted a meaningful set of principal supervisor standards? How are principal supervisors evaluated? Has the district adopted a meaningful set of principal standards? Do the evaluation processes for principals and principal supervisors align?
Cultural shifts	What cultural shifts must the district embrace in order to effect these changes in the principal supervisor role?

While most of this guide is oriented toward the refinement and development of coaching support programs that are distinct from a school system's supervisory structure, NYCLA's facilitative, competency-based approach to coaching offers a basic model that can be useful for district leaders as well. The coaching skills described on pages 30-33 can be powerful tools for those tasked with developing and evaluating principals, and offer a starting place for systems considering what capacity they need to build among the principal supervision team in order to equip supervisors for this broadened role.

83% of principals coached in New York City in the 2012-13 school year served in a school that received Title I funding



COACH DEVELOPMENT

NYCLA's new coaches participate in an orientation program that comprises three stages:

- Training in a foundational understanding of our facilitative, competency-based approach to coaching and of the LPPW and the leadership standards that undergird it;
- A review of current context-specific information; and
- A combination of scenario-based and real-life professional development.

Our onboarding for new coaches includes, among other things, two to three experiences shadowing more experienced coaching colleagues to observe practice and debrief. When the new coach begins working in the field, an experienced coach or program team member accompanies him/her on a visit. Instead of simply observing, the experienced coach will participate in the coaching work when appropriate to model certain techniques.

As NYCLA is an organization committed to continual learning, professional development does not stop with coach orientation. We offer a two-pronged approach to developing coaches over time: planned professional development activities and feedback. Just as we maintain that principals can always improve their leadership practice, so too do we believe that coaches can always improve their coaching practice.

Because we want our coaches to constantly hone their skills, we have made it a priority—in terms of financial commitment and time—to offer them a range of opportunities to continually develop their practice.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The professional development we co-plan and co-deliver alongside our coaches falls into three buckets:

- Context-Driven Work
- Art of Coaching
- Organizational Priorities

54 school leaders
associated with NYCLA
have been named Cahn Fellows

CONTEXT-DRIVEN WORK

Even for our well-established coaching practice in New York City, we have to continue to pay attention to local context. The NYCDOE is constantly updating its accountability measures, instructional and evaluative frameworks, and operations and compliance measures. Many of our coaches are themselves retired principals or former superintendents, but technical knowledge can become outdated rather quickly in the fast-changing education world.

Principals can be overwhelmed by the cacophony of multiple policies. Coaches need to understand district expectations and their leadership implications so that they can provide principals with appropriate support and skill development.

Topics coaches must keep abreast of include:

- Standards, curriculum, and assessment at the state and district levels
- How to analyze student and school data effectively
- Principal and teacher evaluation and tools, and methods for hiring, completing probation, and awarding tenure
- The central office support system and how and where the principal can get information and help, especially for technically specific issues like compliance requirements and budgeting
- Regulations for special groups, such as English Language Learners and students with special needs

As we began direct coaching work for the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), we ensured that our coaches were up to speed on SDP's context before their first meeting with their principals. They first familiarized themselves with all the district's guiding documents (including the district strategic plan, instructional focus, and principal and teacher evaluation standards).

We also wanted coaches to be as familiar as possible with the district's culture. At the start of our engagement, we conducted a series of focus groups with stakeholders, including principals, assistant superintendents, central office staff, representatives from the Commonwealth Association of School Administrators and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, the deputy superintendent, and the superintendent. We shared these findings with our coaches to broaden their understanding of the SDP context.

This information allowed coaches to begin tailoring their work with principals to the SDP priorities and context from the first meeting.

ART OF COACHING

Developing the practice and skills of the coach is an ongoing investment. We create professional development activities on the art of coaching around these themes:

- Strengthening the ability to give useful feedback
- Questioning
- Provoking discomfort in the service of learning
- Working with mental models
- Setting the conditions for maximizing learning
- Establishing trust
- Building the capacity of school teams through work with the principal

ORGANIZATIONAL PRIORITIES

In addition to the context of the districts in which we work, we also work within our own organizational culture, and ensure that our professional development also reflects NYCLA's culture and priorities.

For example, NYCLA has always emphasized equity as an organizational value. Thus, the theme of equity is frequently explored during coach professional development, through reflec-

tion on questions such as, what does equity look like in terms of how we approach schools? How does our commitment to equity drive the way we work with principals?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRUCTURES

To address the topics discussed above, NYCLA coaches attend team meetings for organized professional development every six weeks.

The program team and coaches who plan team meetings choose topics based on patterns of need, areas that need to be revisited and strengthened, and challenges in the field.

In addition to team meetings, coaches also have the opportunity to facilitate and/or participate in their own working groups. These working groups focus on specific skills such as systems thinking. Another group, focused on the theme of “provoking and containing anxiety,” works through challenging coaching scenarios and practices together. The group forms strategies and interventions to provoke and contain anxiety in principals, in the service of learning, and participants then apply these strategies to their work in schools. They are also able to share what they’ve learned with their coach colleagues to build the broader work of the coaching team.

74% of students in schools led by principals we coach are Black or Latino

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

In addition to promoting self-reflection in their principals, our coaches are also encouraged to regularly reflect on their own coaching practice. Some questions a coach may reflect on after a particular session with a principal include:

- Which coaching strategies seemed to work? Which didn’t? What evidence is there to support my impressions?
- What could I have done differently to move the learning?
- Which actions and questions were most helpful in pushing the principal’s thinking? How do I know?
- Which of my questions helped the principal to make meaning and develop new insight? How do I know?
- What approach to giving feedback was most effective?
- How effective was I in anchoring the work in the competencies?

One coach shared her specific practice of reflection. Every time she leaves a meeting with a principal, she either feels that she accomplished her goal for the session, or that there was something she wasn’t able to accomplish.

When the latter is the case, she reviews her notes at the end of the day and makes notes about what she might have handled differently. If the meeting is still nagging at her the following day, she will take some extra time for reflection and replay the meeting in her mind like a video, asking herself, where did I get stuck? How can I move differently next time? If she realizes that she didn’t ask the principal something that she feels she should have asked, she’ll send an email to get the answer and clear the air.

Building a practice of iterative reflection is a crucial habit of mind for learning. Our coaches develop their reflective practice to encourage it in principals, who encourage it in teachers, who encourage it in students.

FEEDBACK

Feedback is an essential skill for growth. Our program team observes each coach in the field at least twice per year to provide feedback, making additional visits if necessary on a case-by-case basis. Because of the number of coaches, this takes up a significant amount of the program team's time; but feedback is a valuable instigator of growth for coaches, just as feedback from principals is crucial for teachers to improve their practice.

In addition to these formal visits, coaches also conduct peer intervisitations in the field once or twice per year to observe each other's coaching practice. Sometimes these visits are a more general observation of practice, and sometimes coaches visit a colleague with the purpose of gaining insight into a particular coach's area of strength (for example, working with the principal of a new small school). This practice is usually voluntary, but sometimes the LSP team recommends an intervisitation based on a coach's learning needs.

After an intervisitation, coaches complete a reflection sheet:

- What coaching moves stood out to you during this visit? What, if anything, surprised you?
- What, if any, insights about your own coaching practice did you gain from visiting your colleague? Will you make any changes in your own practice as a result of this visit? If so, what?
- Describe the experience of giving feedback to your colleague. What decisions did you make in delivering the feedback? How did you choose what to focus on? What low-inference data did you use to push your colleague's thinking? What, if anything, was hard about giving feedback? What, if anything, would you say/do differently in hindsight?

Coaches also receive feedback on their coaching practice by reviewing feedback surveys from their principals, discussed more in detail in the Evaluation section below.

In addition, our evaluation activities provide each coach with feedback on how his or her principals are progressing as a whole, and how his/her principals are progressing compared to other coaches' principals.

Developing Coach Capacity in New Haven

New Haven Public Schools launched a comprehensive leadership development program in 2012 to create highly effective and skilled school leaders. One of the drivers for this change was the fact that high-performing assistant principals who moved into the principalship often struggled in their new roles. The district created its own Leadership Practices Framework to guide leader development and evaluation. It also needed a systematic way of supporting early-career principals as they came on board. New Haven worked with us to train a cadre of coaches.

New Haven coaches first attended a facilitated coach training session followed by individual work using our Online Coaching Modules. These coaches then visited New York City schools to shadow NYCLA coaches in action, followed by a debriefing workshop. The coaches then attended a second facilitated coach training session where they shared and discussed areas of challenge. Finally, the NYCLA coaches shadowed the New Haven coaches to give feedback and suggestions on new strategies and ways to strengthen their coaching practice. This scaffolded model built coach knowledge over time with supports and personalized feedback from experienced coaches and trainers. Directors at the district level were also included in the training workshops to build district capacity and strengthen principal support.

Strengthening Coach Training in Alabama

NYCLA collaborated with the Alabama State Department of Education to strengthen the training of coaches for select principals. This is an expansion of a successful pilot effort that focused on one region of the state. Now there are 15 coaches working statewide to help principals quickly develop leadership skills and build upon their early successes as school leaders. These coaches accessed our Online Coaching Modules to supplement their regular, in-person coach training offered by the state. In addition, NYCLA staff engaged with the coaches through a series of webinars throughout the school year to help the coaches, who are sitting principals themselves, develop their coaching skills. The webinars were aligned with the work the coaches were doing throughout the year and focused on topics important to the coaches and to the state, including using facilitative techniques in coaching, expanding one's repertoire of questioning techniques, and how to use role plays in coaching practice. The webinars also allowed for interaction and discussion of common challenges and have helped to build community within the coaches who are dispersed throughout the state.

98% of principals
report that coaching improved
their leadership practice

INSIDE A COACHING SESSION: COACHING THE COACH

Gary is working with Carl, an elementary school principal, on continuing to improve instruction, though the school recently received an A on the NYC Progress Report. NYCLA's coaching program director, Marie, recently attended one of Gary's coaching sessions with Carl to provide Gary with feedback on his coaching practice.

Gary began the coaching session with a closer review of recent school data, which showed that the progress of the English Language Learner (ELL) population is lagging and the results in math are not what they should be (especially as compared with the English Language Acquisition (ELA) population). The pair discussed the data's implications for Carl's instructional leadership, specifically classroom observations, professional development planning, and use of data to drive instruction.

Gary had Carl unpack the instructional practices in ELA that significantly contributed to the school finally receiving an A on the Progress Report. He then had Carl apply that thinking to an approach for improving the school's outcomes in math. "What were the successful practices in ELA that ultimately moved you into an A?" "What did you do in ELA that got you here on this level?" "What is the connection between all of this and math?" "What will be new and different about math given what you just said about ELA?"

Gary then shifted the focus of the conversation to Carl's own role in moving the work forward. He asked how Carl could use his time differently in order to make more of an impact on teacher practice. Honing in on teacher observations, Carl was compelled to reveal that he hadn't started the observations for Advance, the NYCDOE teacher evaluation system.

Throughout the session, Gary pushed Carl on the importance of collecting data, clarifying and narrowing his focus, documenting, and communicating. "How do you capture that information?" "How will you message this?" "What is the most important thing?" Continuing in the vein of improving teacher practice, Gary moved on to focus on professional development. Looking at the professional development plan, he asked Carl, "How will this year be different than last year?" When Carl responded that he was trying to get more targeted on the specific skills that his teachers needed to develop, Gary asked, "What can you do to hold teachers accountable for using those skills?"

Marie, after observing Gary's coaching session, had several pieces of feedback for Gary:

- Gary might consider ending his sessions with Carl by having him summarize his take-aways, articulate upcoming actions, and commit to a timeline. This will enable Gary to hold Carl accountable and build coherence from one visit to the next.
- At one point, Carl articulated that he does too much reflecting and needs to do more acting overall. During their debrief, Marie mentioned to Gary that she thought this conversation became representative of that very paradigm. Marie wondered if Carl's needs might have been better served had the conversation been shorter and had the two actually done some of the scheduling together. However, Gary's experience with Carl is that he follows up straightaway, so he opted not to do the scheduling with Carl during the visit.
- As evidenced by the questions captured above, Gary has grown significantly in his listening and questioning skills. He has become more adept at surfacing principals' thinking and pushing them to do the work. He also pays close attention to language as a way to work with the principal's mental models. Moving forward, Gary can continue to build this skill and listen for opportunities to create cognitive dissonance for his principals. At one point, Carl remarked that he doesn't have time to go into classrooms, because he is taken away from that work by issues that come up. When Gary pushed back, asking if other people in the building could address those situations, Carl said, "I'm the type that needs to know everything that's happening in my building and that it's happening properly." Does Carl feel that same sense when it comes to instruction? If so, how would he reconcile that to his lack of observations?



PROGRAM EVALUATION

Measuring the impact of coaching is challenging. Schools are complicated, and while our philosophy of coaching and all leadership development is to impact leadership practice on behalf of students, it is difficult to draw a line from coaching directly to student outcomes.

However, our Research and Evaluation (R&E) team works to evaluate program effectiveness. This provides crucial internal accountability and invites our staff into a process of continual improvement. We are constantly refining our programmatic evaluation practices and asking new research questions to add to our learning as an organization.

Our R&E team conducts evaluation activities each year that serve two purposes: to inform program change and the work of coaching, and to collect evidence of program success and participant growth. Each year, we conduct a feedback survey of principals who received coaching. We also recently developed and piloted a new tool, the Leadership Behavior Survey, which asks principals and coaches to reflect independently on the principal's leadership behaviors, aligned to the LPPW.

FEEDBACK SURVEY

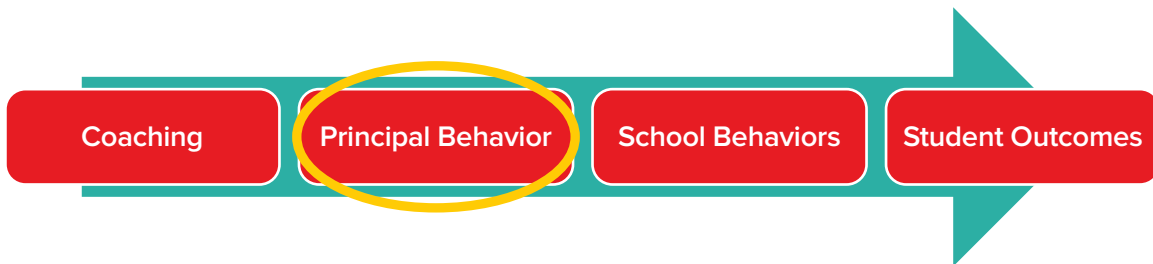
The feedback survey is administered at the end of each academic year to principals who received coaching. Its purpose is to gather feedback about their coaching experience.

The survey measures, among other things, the principal's perception of coaching's impact on key areas such as the principal's leadership practice and ability to develop the capacity of others, and the school's classroom instruction and school culture. It measures overall satisfaction with coaching and the principal's perception of the quality of coaching he/she received.

The tool also captures principal feedback on areas where more support is needed and where the coach could build his/her effectiveness.

LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR SURVEY

Our philosophy of coaching is that coaching impacts principal behavior, which impacts school behaviors and processes, which influence student outcomes. The Leadership Behavior Survey (LBS) is an attempt to uncover coaching's impact on principal behavior.



The LBS is rooted in the LPPW and describes behaviors and examples of what it looks like for a principal to be approaching or meeting standards in each dimension.

The survey is administered in the fall and spring to all principals participating in at least 36 hours of individual coaching and to their coaches. Each individual responds to 53 questions on a Likert scale, describing the degree to which the principal exhibits certain leadership behaviors (e.g., Never or almost never; Occasionally; Frequently; Most of the time; Always or almost always).

Each statement is aligned to one of the eight LPPW dimensions, but statements are mixed throughout the survey so that their corresponding dimension may not appear obvious to respondents. Statement examples include “I have difficulty reading people’s verbal and non-verbal cues (for example, tone, body language)” (which aligns to Communication); “I use research to drive instructional and organizational decisions” (Learning); and “I behave in a way that is

an excellent model for my staff and students (for example, professional appearance, demeanor, speech)” (Personal Behavior).

Our R&E team analyzes the survey responses and prepares a report indicating the principal’s and the coach’s perceptions of the principal’s performance in each LPPW dimension.

The LBS serves multiple purposes:

- On the principal level, the results are used to inform the coaching work and to help participants reflect on their practice. If a principal scores himself or herself highly in Communication, but the coach scores him/her lower, this discrepancy opens up a conversation about communication practices.
- On the coach level, LBS results help coaches reflect on their coaching practice across principals, and also evaluate how their trends compare to other coaches’ work.
- On the program level, the tool is used to measure changes in participants’ behavior over the course of coaching.

DATA DRIVES CHANGES IN PRACTICE

Last year, data emerged from the feedback surveys and the LBS that principals we were serving through our NYCDOE work were having varying degrees of success around whether their principals were meeting the goals they had set for their coaching work over the course of a year. Based on this data, the LSP team decided to change the way coaches set goals with principals.

Previously, at the start of each school year the coach would have the principal set two to three goals that were dimension-specific (i.e., the principal would work on improving his/her communication skills). Part of the struggle was that principals also had to submit goals for the NYCDOE Principal Performance Review (PPR). Some coaches and principals conflated these two goal-setting exercises, and some kept the two separate.

The LSP team changed the way goal-setting was framed for the coach-principal relationship. Coaches now frame the goal-setting process as what the principal wants to accomplish in the school with the support of the coach, usually linking the coaching work directly to PPR goals.

Results from the LBS then pinpoint the dimension(s) in the principal's leadership that need further development in order to successfully fulfill those school-based goals. So rather than creating an isolated goal around communication, a goal for the coaching work is around improving written and oral communication skills in the service of cultivating greater parent/community involvement.

This year we will review the data again to see whether this adjustment in goal-setting has resulted in more meaningful goals.

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES AND LONG-TERM IMPACT

Our annual evaluation plan for each department, including LSP, begins with tweaking the department's logic model. Our Senior Director of Research and Evaluation, along with the LSP program team and a few coaches, reviews the logic model, the previous year's evaluation data, and considers whether the logic model, which is a living document, needs to be tweaked.

Our current logic model includes six short-term outcomes:

- Principals are satisfied with coaching and perceive a positive impact
- Improved principal leadership behavior
- Progress toward goals set with coach
- Principals are retained for a second year
- Principals choose to participate in further coaching
- Principal secure in position, rated effective on Principal Performance Review

It also includes three long-term impact results:

- Principals successfully complete probation
- Principals improve school behaviors
- Principals improve student achievement

Our evaluation activities are then designed around these short-term outcomes and long-term impacts to measure the extent to which the program is meeting its goals.



A FINAL WORD

One of the intended outcomes of facilitative, competency-based coaching is that principals shift their leadership behaviors. Ideally, the concepts and techniques that coaches model when working with principals are practices that principals themselves adapt in their work with their faculty. In fact, we have worked with districts that have recognized the value of developing coaching skills and competence as part of a broader approach to district and school leadership development.

In our experience, when school systems work to foster principals' learning, it begins to impact the system as a whole. This investment in a culture of leadership development and continuous reflection pays dividends in a more productive learning culture among adults for the benefit of students.

199 coaches have utilized
our Online Coaching Modules

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS AVAILABLE

NYC Leadership Academy is committed to improving student learning and success nationwide—particularly among the most vulnerable students—through high-quality school leadership. Through our national consulting practice, we help districts, universities, and other organizations build their own capacity to design, implement, and continuously improve preparation and support programs that are responsive to local education reforms and needs. For more information about our consulting services, please visit www.nycleadershipacademy.org.

MATERIALS

Please visit our website at www.nycleadershipacademy.org/news-and-resources for access to the following NYCLA coaching materials:

- Sample dimensions of the LPPW - 1.0 (Personal Behavior) and 3.0 (Communication)
- Sample coach team meeting agenda
- Coach observation reflection form
- Videos from our online coaching modules
- Coach intervisitation reflection sheet
- Group interview scenario
- Retreat planning tool
- Coaching compact

ENDNOTES

- 1 Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*. The Wallace Foundation
- 2 Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*. The Wallace Foundation.
- 3 Waters, T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. Available online at www.mcrel.org.
4. Béteille, T., Kalogrides, D., and Loeb, S. (2011). *Stepping stones: Principal career paths and school outcomes*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University. Branch, G. F., Hanushek, E. A. and Rivkin, S. G. (2012). *Estimating the Effect of Leaders on Public Sector Productivity: The case of school principals*. Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research. Portin, B., Schneider, P., DeArmond, M., and Gundlach, L. (2003).
5. <https://www.metlife.com/assets/cao/foundation/MetLife-Teacher-Survey-2012.pdf>, p. 23.
- 6 Barnett & O'Mahoney, 2008; Barnett, B.G., and O'Mahoney, G.R. (2008). "Mentoring and coaching programs for the professional development of school leaders." Chapter 12 in J. Lumby, G. Crow, and P. Pashiardis (eds) *International Handbook on the Preparation and Development of School Leaders*. Abingdon: Routledge. Spiro, J., Mattis, M., and Mitgang, L. (2007). *Getting Principal Mentoring Right: Lessons from the Field*. The Wallace Foundation.
- 7 School Leaders Network (2014). *Churn: The High Cost of Principal Turnover*. Available online at http://connectleadsucceed.org/sites/default/files/principal_turnover_cost.pdf.
- 8 The Wallace Foundation (2013). *Rethinking Leadership: The Changing Role of Principal Supervisors*.
- 9 McKinsey Global Survey Results. Building capabilities for performance. Copyright 2014. All rights reserved McKinsey & Co. The contributors to the development and analysis of this survey include Richard Benson-Armer, a director in McKinsey's Stamford office; Sisu Otto, a specialist in the Hong Kong office; and Gina Webster, a specialist in the New York office.
- 10 For more information, see: Bloom, G., Castagna, C., Moir, E., & Warren, B. (2005). *Blended Coaching: Skills and Strategies to Support Principal Development*. Corwin Press.
- 11 Senge, P. (1990) *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*.
- 12 Our beliefs about adult learning are informed by: Donovan, M., Bransford, J.D., & Pelligrino, J. (1999). *How people learn: Bridging research and practice*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press; Drago-Severson, E. (2004). *Becoming adult learners: Principles and practices for effective development*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press; Fink, L.D. (1999, July 19). *Active learning*. Retrieved August 28, 2008, from <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachti...>; Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; Lieb, S. (1991, Fall). *Principles of adult learning. Vision*. Retrieved August 28, 2008, from <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachti...>; Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Zemke, R., & Zemke, S. (1984). *30 things we know for sure about adult learning*. *Innovation Abstracts*, 6(8). Retrieved August 28, 2008, from <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/adults-3.htm>.
- 13 Senge, P. (1990) *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*.
- 14 Scott, L.M. (2012). *Improving the quality and sustainability of principal mentoring programs: The Wallace Foundation Mentoring Professional Learning Community Project Report*. Unpublished.





NYC Leadership Academy
45-18 Court Square, 2nd Floor
Long Island City, NY 11101

nyleadershipacademy.org