Testimony on

"Educating our Educators: How Federal Policy Can Better Support Teachers and School Leaders."

Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives

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Good morning, Chairman Sablan, Chairwoman Davis, Ranking Members Allen and Smucker, and members of the Committee. My name is Tricia McManus, and I am the Assistant Superintendent for Leadership, Professional Development and School Transformation in Hillsborough County Public Schools. In this role, I oversee our Principal Pipeline, professional development for teachers and leaders, and fifty of our schools who have historically struggled with performance. Thank you for inviting me to speak today, and thank you for your leadership and service to our country. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to testify about the importance of pre-service training and ongoing support and development of school leaders. The success of our schools and the students entrusted upon us greatly depend on the effectiveness of the adults that have chosen this noble profession of education.

OVERVIEW

I come before you today as an educator with twenty-eight years of experience. I have served as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, and district leader with one goal in mind throughout my career, to make the lives of our students better and to strengthen access and opportunities for students who have been underserved in order to close achievement gaps and give every student the future they so greatly deserve. A strong educational experience for each student requires system and school change that is driven by equity and the belief that we must differentiate resources and supports to level the playing field if we are to provide every student a chance at a better tomorrow. It means that equal opportunity for high-quality, on-grade level, and rigorous coursework and instruction exists for every student regardless of race and zip code. It means that exposure to electives and extracurricular activities that promote positive social, emotional, mental and physical health and can lead to future college and career choices are available to every student. It means that facilities that house every one of our students are equipped with updated technologies and are safe and inviting places to learn. It means that racial and other biases are addressed, disparities in how students of color are disciplined are eliminated, and

student connectedness to school is greatly improved due to strong relationships with adults and opportunities to have a voice.

None of this can be achieved absent great leadership. We cannot afford to have pockets of great leaders in some schools and then others who drive adults away, allow students to fall through the cracks, and stay in reactive mode verses creating sustainable systems and structures that lead to dramatic improvements for students. According to researchers, Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson, "We have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership." They further state, "There are no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader."

Recent research shows the impact of a strong leader on improving outcomes for schools and its students. These are leaders capable of transforming a school environment so that its students and teachers can flourish. These are the kinds of leaders we are working so hard to recruit, develop, hire, support, and retain as we achieve success for each and every student in our system. This is the why behind the Principal Pipeline in Hillsborough County Public Schools and other districts across the country.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Hillsborough County Public Schools is the 8th largest district in the country. We serve nearly 218,000 students in more than 300 school sites including 142 K-5 elementary schools, 43 middle schools, 27 high schools, 5 K-8 schools, 9 exceptional centers, 4 career centers, 4 technical colleges, 68 adult programs and 49 charter schools.

Hillsborough County Public Schools serves a diverse student population. Our student demographics include 4.2% Asian, 21.13% Black, 35.40% Hispanic, .22% Indian, 5.63% Multi-Racial, and 33.42% White. 60.62% of our students are economically disadvantaged, 11.75% are English Language Learners, and 14.19% are students with exceptionalities.

HCPS is the largest employer in Hillsborough County with more than 25,000 employees. On the Nation's Report Card, which shows the results of the NAEP assessment, Hillsborough ranks at the top of twenty-seven large districts across America. Fourth graders tied for 1st place in reading and math and eight graders tied for first place in reading and second place in math. Our graduation rates have risen from 73.5% in 2014, to 85.8% in 2018. As a learning organization, we celebrate these successes but know we have a long way to go in our effort to completely close achievement gaps.

THE WHY BEHIND THE PRINCIPAL PIPELINE

Seven years ago, Hillsborough County Public Schools was one of six large-urban districts selected to partner with the Wallace Foundation to study the following question, "If districts put in place a comprehensive and aligned principal pipeline, ensuring the placement of strong principals into school leader vacancies, would student outcomes be positively impacted?" Seven years later and after six years of designing and implementing specific components of the pipeline to create one comprehensive system in each district, a RAND report commissioned by the

Wallace Foundation (April 2019), shows that principal pipelines do work. The study shows that schools in large urban districts that built principal pipelines markedly outperformed similar schools in comparisons districts in both reading and math.

Before the pipeline, Hillsborough had select components of the work in place such as a set of standards and a pre-service program called the Preparing New Principals Program but we were lacking a deep understanding of the leader standards and they were not the foundation of recruitment, hiring, developing and evaluating school leaders. In other words, the components were acting in isolation and there was no clear and aligned talent management system for principals. This led to a lack of clarity in the system and hiring decisions based on "gut" rather than specific competency-based data. This also led to a talent pool of hundreds of leaders, many of whom were not ready for AP and Principal roles, especially in our most struggling schools. In addition, principal training components were very technical in nature and lacked the deep leadership knowledge and experiences needed to truly prepare leaders to transform schools. The graphic below shows old way of work vs new way of work in our quest to have better prepared leaders. The pipeline was the key lever we knew we had to address if we were going to get the best results for our schools and the students we serve.

	OLD WAY	NEW WAY
Core Competencies	*Ten state standards* were used to evaluate principals, but were not used as the driving force behind how we recruit, hire and develop aspiring and current school leaders.	The District worked with school leaders to develop *five core competencies* that form the basis of the Principal Pipeline program. These core competencies drive everything that is done within the District regarding school leadership, from hiring and interviewing to selection of candidates, developing and evaluating. Each program of the Pipeline, from the Future Leaders Academy to the Principal Induction Program, is developed to center on the core competencies and prepare and support assistant principals and principals in their roles.
Selection and Pre-Service Training Programs	**Recruitment:** No official recruitment efforts existed. Those aspiring to school leadership self-selected into an Education Leadership program to receive their certification and become an assistant principal. Assistant principals self-selected to move into Preparing New Principals and the principal role.	**Recruitment:** The District has established formalized partnerships with several local universities to host yearly recruitment fairs. Principals give invitations to teachers that they feel are good candidates for school leadership. Data is used to identify leadership areas for which candidates are needed, and the District works to fill those needed areas.
	Selection: In order to get into the assistant principal pool, aspiring school leaders sat through a *15-minute panel interview* where they were asked general questions related to school leadership. A similar process was used to get into the principal applicant pool.	**Selection:** A comprehensive selection process driven by the core competencies is used. Interviews for FLA are 90 minutes (120 minutes for PNP candidates) and *include performance assessments and interview questions, tied to the core competencies.* Trained interview teams rate the candidates on the core competencies, and the best candidates move into the pre-service training programs.

	OLD WAY	NEW WAY
Selection and Pre-Service Training Programs	*Pre-Service Training:* Aspiring assistant principals secured an Educational Leadership Certification. The District did not work with local universities to align program expectations. The Preparing New Principals program was an isolated program that did not address the changing and evolving role of principals.	*Pre-Service Training:* The District works closely with five local universities who have shifted their coursework and experiences to align with the District's standards. These universities went through an assessment period to ensure their programs were producing quality candidates. Candidates must secure an Educational Leadership Certification and upon selection, enter the FLA program to begin their school leadership journey. Changes were made to the Preparing New Principals program that addressed the changing and evolving role of the principals and aligned with national principal preparation expectations. Candidates of FLA and PNP must successfully exit the pre-service programs before they enter the assistant principal and principal applicant pools.
Succession Planning and Hiring	No succession planning existed. It was a very reactive process and vacancies were posted as they occurred. The District advertised a job and selected a candidate from the applications in a more immediate manner, sometimes resulting in an incompatible selection.	Formal succession planning takes place, with vacancies identified by the District 8 to 12 months in advance. District leaders look ahead at upcoming vacancies and meet to discuss how the existing candidate pool fits with the upcoming vacancies. A *Leader Selection Tool* was created to house all the data from candidates in the Pipeline program who are qualified to enter the vacancies. After reviewing the data of who would best fit the position, a short list of candidates is developed. Thanks to the Pipeline program, the District is able to maintain a *3:1 ratio* of candidates for each hire. For every one vacancy posted, the District is able to vet three qualified candidates for consideration and appointment.
On-the-Job Evaluation and Support	*Support:* Once a principal was hired, keys to the school were turned over and they began their job. No official onboarding process existed to help transition principals in their new role and acclimate them to the new school. Area Directors (now called Area Superintendents) were focused on operations and management, and not on the instructional process. Continuing education courses were offered sporadically and focused on information sharing.	*Support:* Once appointed, principals immediately attend an onboarding and transition meeting that happens before even stepping on the school campus. A principal coach is assigned immediately that will support the growth of the principal for two years, as they progress through the Principal Induction Program, the final phase of HPP. An Area Superintendent and Area Leadership team helps support principals in both an information sharing and professional development capacity. Goal setting is a formalized process and is used each year as the blueprint for the school year, aligned to the five core competencies with which principals are trained. Principals attend courses on a quarterly basis that are based on their needs and established goals. Additionally, programs like School Administration Manager, or SAM, which is a professional development process to support instructional leadership, have been implemented across all District schools. Principals also attend a yearly summer institute, designed for principals by principals.
	Evaluation: Principals were assessed by a generic rubric of principal practice based on the 10 state standards.	*Evaluation:* Each year, principals are assessed by a competency assessment rubric that shows how the continuum of practice aligns with the core competencies. Principals review their results with their principal coach and/or Area Superintendent and the results are used to determine goals for the next year, as well as identify each principal's strength and improvement areas.

THE PIPELINE COMPONENTS

Due to need, proven research, and a partner to support our learning, we made the decision to embark on the Principal Pipeline Initiative. This meant a commitment to designing a comprehensive school leader talent management system grounded in leader standards/competencies that defined the role of principal in our district. In order to create this system, we had to address four key components: leader standards/competencies, pre-service training which included recruitment and selection processes, selective hiring, and on the job evaluation and support.

1. **Defined Leadership:** Redesign job responsibilities for principals, assistant principals and area directors to encompass new leadership standards.

4. **On-the-Job Evaluation and Support:** Evaluate principals regularly and provide professional development opportunities, including mentoring.

2. **Pre-Service Training:** Overhaul the recruitment, selection and training process to ensure the most effective leaders are included.

3. **Selective Hiring:** Recruit, hire and promote only the most effective and well-trained candidates.

The district began by identifying the competencies most important for a principal to be able to demonstrate in order to successfully lead a school that advances outcomes for students. The competencies include:

Achievement Focus and Results Orientation – Principals must hold themselves and others accountable for high academic achievement for all students, communicate a clear, compelling vision of high academic achievement, and exhibit a commitment to equity by creating a collective sense of urgency to close achievement gaps and prepare all students for college and career success.
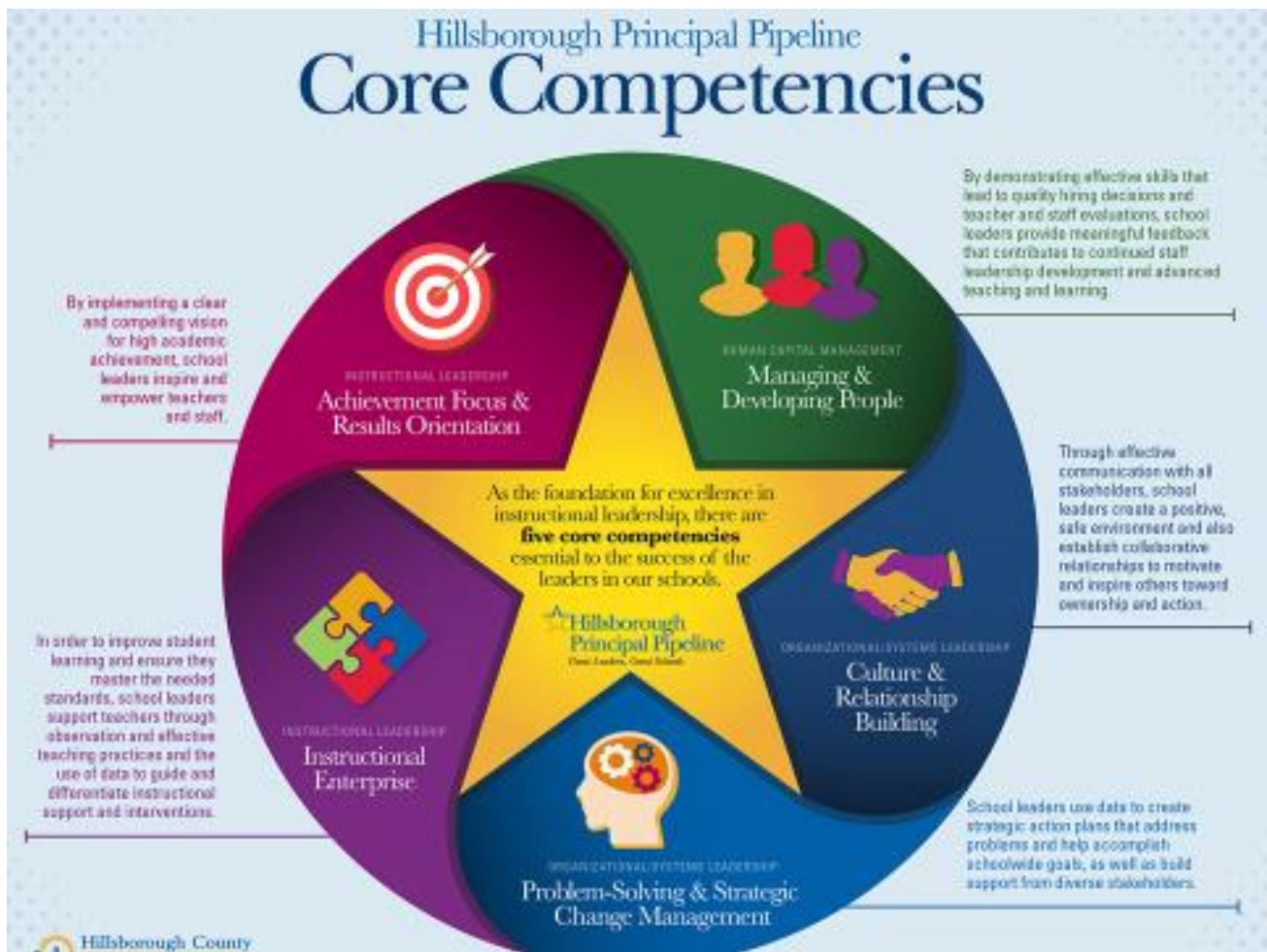
Instructional Expertise – Principals must conduct high-quality classroom observations, identify effective teaching practices and understand pedagogy that results in improved student learning. They must ensure that students master standards by aligning curriculum, instructional strategies and assessments.

Managing and Developing People – Principals must use multiple methods to evaluate teacher and staff effectiveness and provide timely, targeted, and actionable feedback. They must also use data to plan job-embedded professional development for teachers. They must distribute and develop staff leadership and build teacher teams able to advance teaching and learning. Finally,

they must be able to exhibit effective recruitment, interview and selection skills that lead to quality hiring decisions and be able to retain high performers.

Culture and Relationship Building – Principals must create a positive and safe environment for teachers, students, families and the community. They must embrace diverse viewpoints, communicate effectively with all stakeholders, and inspire other adults to feel ownership and take action.

Problem Solving and Strategic Change Management – Principals must be able to collect, analyze, and use multiple forms of data to make decisions. They must be able to identify the root cause of problems and develop effective strategies for resolving issues as well as develop and implement clear action plans and systems to advance school goals all while building buy-in from diverse stakeholders.

Knowing the expectations/competencies for the role of principal, we then began designing all other components to align to these competencies.   Pre-service programs and on-the-job support were two of the components that were extremely impactful for AP and Principal readiness and early success in the role. Hillsborough instituted two pre-service programs.   Both programs

were designed using a cohort model and following best practices for high quality professional development.

Future Leaders Academy (FLA)
Future Leaders Academy was designed for aspiring APs. The program lasts six months and takes place after a candidate has graduated from an accredited Educational Leadership Program. In six months, participants take part in coursework related to leading for equity, cultural responsiveness, creating a restorative culture, providing effective feedback, having hard conversations and more. They also gain more exposure to the leader competencies by participating in job-embedded learning experiences similar to those they will experience upon entering the role of AP.

Preparing New Principals (PNP)
The second pre-service program takes place prior to becoming a principal. It is for Assistant Principals with three years of successful experience who want to begin applying for principal positions. Preparing New Principals Program is a two-year program that includes coursework, job embedded learning experiences, and the design of a 90-day entry plan that is used upon entering a school as principal. Although the PNP program has been in existence for over thirty years, it was completely overhauled to meet expectations of the new competencies. Courses and content addressed in PNP include Leading for Equity, Implicit Bias, Poverty Simulations, Culturally Responsive Leadership, Developing Systems of Support for Teachers, Student and Staff Culture, Leading Change, Recruiting and Hiring High Quality Staff, Design Thinking, and more. Job embedded experiences include creating a vision for leadership, leading an equity audit in their school and planning next steps, creating and implementing a schools-wide PD plan, leading a change initiative, etc. The final project of the two years is to present a ninety-day entry plan that addresses the five leader competencies and content learned throughout the program. Entry plans are also presented during the interview process for principal positions. On the job coaching takes place during both pre-service programs by current principals.

In addition to two pre-service programs, Hillsborough also designed two induction programs to support new APs and Principals in their first two years in the job.

Assistant Principal Induction Program (APIP)
APIP is a two year program to support new APs. In addition to monthly sessions with cohort members designed to address problems of practice, leaders continue to develop their knowledge and skills through ongoing coursework that builds upon FLA. They are assigned an experienced and carefully selected AP mentor to support their growth over the two years.

Principal Induction Program (PIP)
PIP is a two year program designed to support new principals. Participants take part in monthly cohort sessions that build upon the learnings from PNP and allow principals to share problems of practice and solve them together as they grow in their craft. Every new principal is assigned an induction coach who provides onboarding and transition coaching as the new principal enters, and weekly coaching supports throughout the two years. Coaches are full-released, high performing principals, hired specifically to ensure the success of our new principals.
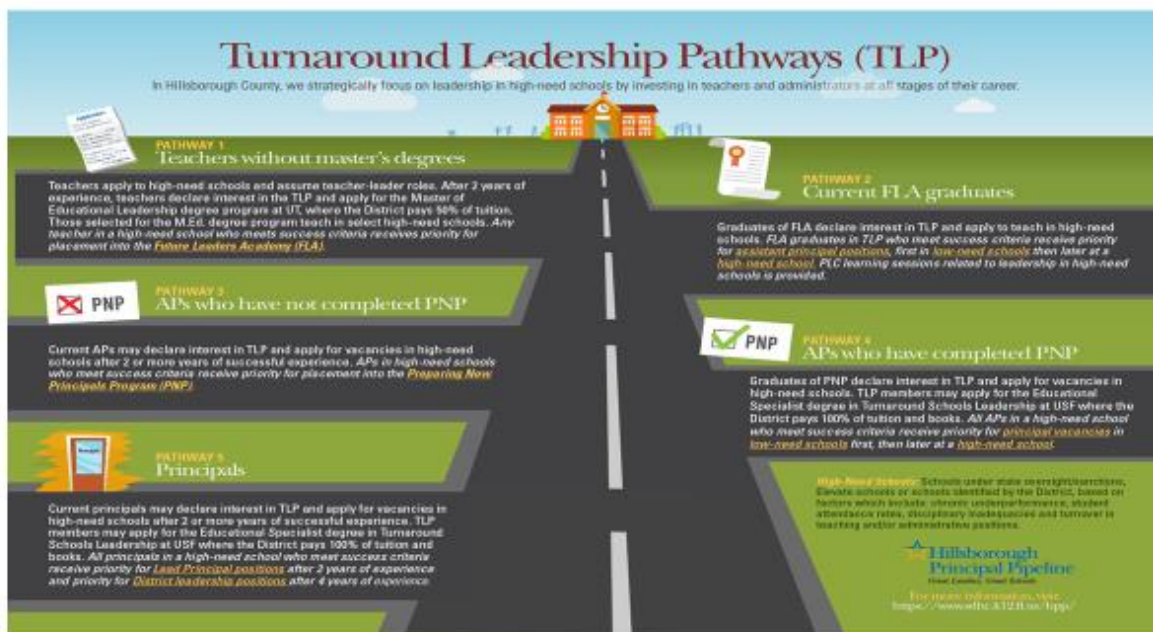
The four development programs were designed to ensure readiness and ongoing support of our school leaders. These programs have been instrumental is setting clear expectations for our leaders and providing them with the training, coaching, and support needed to demonstrate mastery and strong performance on the leader competencies.

Turn Around Leader Pathways (TLP)
The district also formed a Turn-Around Leader Pathways program to recruit experienced leaders with a proven track record into our schools in need of turn around and those that have faced chronic underperformance. Coursework for this program was designed in partnership with two local universities who had a similar vision for changing outcomes for our most vulnerable students in our most underserved communities. Each year, HCPS in partnership with our universities, select aspiring APs for an M.Ed in Leadership for School Turn Around (University of Tampa) and veteran principals for an Ed.S in Leadership for School Turn Around (University of South Florida). The programs once again build on our leader competencies while specifically focusing on the competencies most needed to turn around struggling schools. We want our leaders completely prepared for this important work.

Turnaround Leadership Pathways (TLP)

Other components that were designed or changed as part of the Principal Pipeline Initiative included: redesigning selection and hiring processes so that they truly allowed us to assess candidate performance on our leader competencies, developing succession planning processes to forecast vacancies and planning ahead to ensure strong candidates in the pool, developing a leader tracking system to house data on all of our leaders to help inform hiring decisions, re-designing our principal evaluation to assess leader competencies, re-designing the role of principal supervisor from being one of manager and fire-fighter to one of principal coach and instructional leader, and restructuring systems of support for principals.

All of these factors worked and continue to work in an aligned and sustained system that allows the district to place the right leaders in positions where they can make the most difference for students, families, and overall school communities.

The role of school principal is complex and the expectations set upon them require that they are developed prior to the job, while on the job, and throughout their time in the role. We have to create the same learning organization for our principals that we expect them to create with their staffs. Principals are the ones that set the right conditions for staff and students to be successful and we must ensure they have the tools needed to accomplish this heavy lift. This is why it is critical that federal policy support the development of school principals the same way it does for our classroom teachers. The magic happens in our schools, when leaders and teachers work together in support of students.

TAKING THE PIPELINE TO SCALE

Over the six years of implementation, the Wallace Foundation provided $12.5 million dollars to HCPS to support district learning to advance the pipeline components. Every component we developed was designed to be sustained by embedding it into the culture of the district, creating

systems and structures that could be replicated over time as well as figuring out local and state funding sources that could support leadership development efforts such as Title II, Title 1 and other grants. A pipeline sustainability study released in February 2019 showed that each of the six districts were able to sustain their pipeline components outside of Wallace funding thanks to others funding sources. The learnings and findings from the six districts are now available to other systems who may want to replicate the work in their districts.

RESULTS

The results have been extremely positive in HCPS. We have approximately 50 aspiring principals and 130 aspiring APs in our talent pool and ten experienced principals in the Turn-Around Leadership Pathways. All of these leaders were selected under new competencies and more rigorous processes and are high performing in their current roles. We have had less than 2% turnover in principal positions since the inception of the pipeline. Other results include:

- The Principal Pipeline was designated a promising district practice by Advanced ED
- There was an increase in diverse and effective Principal and AP candidate pools at a 3:1 ratio, meaning three strong candidates for every vacancy.
- New principals and APs are better prepared than ever before based on impact surveys, rubric ratings, teacher feedback, and student outcomes.
- New leaders are committed to equity based on closing of gaps in graduation rates, decreasing of discipline referrals and suspensions of students of color, and increasing the number of mentoring programs and other student supports.

CONCLUSION

Education is the great equalizer for our students. Without great schools, more and more students will lack the skills needed to be high level readers, problem solvers and thinkers, which are skills that are very much needed for future success. We must make school leadership a priority as we think about ways to improve schools across the country. When we think of other professions, no organization is successful without strong leadership. The difference is, when our schools are not successful, students' futures and lives are at stake.

We are a nation with vast resources and we should prioritize funding to states and districts to support the preparation, development and ongoing support of leaders who have been given the charge to create brighter outcomes for our students by breaking down barriers that prevent them from becoming all that they can be. We cannot rest until 100 percent of our students receive the education they deserve. The Higher Education Act should reflect what practitioners already know to be true: effective school leadership is one of the most important levers to ensure an equitable education for all of our students.

Thank you for allowing me the time to address why strong leadership preparation and development programs, specifically principal pipelines are so important to the future of education. Leadership matters! Our students matter! I look forward to answering any questions.