

Effective Principal Leadership

Learn how you can partner with your principal to foster student learning & build school culture so all students can thrive



Family Playbooks

Key info, data, and research to help parents and caregivers make **informed decisions and take action** on important topics



Research shows that family engagement in schools is closely linked to:

- Improved student academic achievement
- Enhanced student social skills
- Fewer student behavior issues
- Improved parent-teacher & teacher-student relationships
- Positive school environments



**Parents & caregivers
are key for student
and school success.**



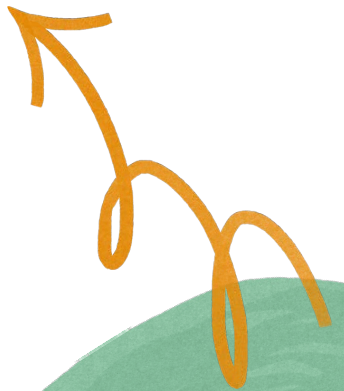
Contents

LEARN:

- 4 [The principal's role](#)
- 5 [What do effective principals do?](#)
- 29 [References](#)
- 31 [About Playbooks & the UChicago Consortium](#)

TAKE ACTION:

- 14 [How parents can work with principals](#)
- 19 [Research insights for Local School Council \(LSC\) members](#)
- 25 [Data dive: How can I use data to learn more about my school?](#)

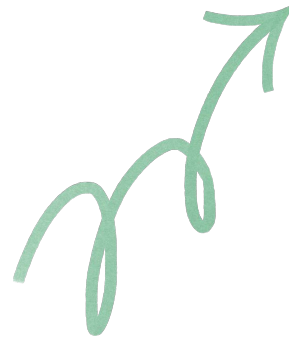




The principal's role

Principals wear many different hats:

- Hire and manage staff
- Lead instructional support and improvement
- Manage the budget
- Work with families and communities
- Approve curricula
- Manage class offerings and schedules
- Manage building operations
- Juggle needs and requests from district leaders, teachers, students, families, and their Local School Council (LSC)



On average, Illinois principals manage a \$7.6 million budget & 478 enrolled students.

The Illinois Principal Their Work,
Their Challenges, Their Impact

RESEARCH SAYS:

Effective principals...

1

Have positive effects on student outcomes

2

Build strong school-wide culture

3

Create conditions where teachers can be most effective

4

Share leadership and invest in teacher leadership

5

Find, advocate for, and manage resources and relationships

6

Welcome and engage families



See page 29 for a full list of references cited in this section & throughout the playbook.

RESEARCH SAYS:

1

Effective principals have positive effects on student outcomes

This includes students'...

- Grades
- Standardized test scores
- Attendance
- Discipline, including suspension rates
- Feelings of safety, connection, and value
- Long-term outcomes, such as:
 - High school graduation
 - College enrollment
 - College persistence

Elementary students with a principal at the 84th vs. 50th percentile of effectiveness showed about 2 months more learning in a year.

How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research

For more info on grades, tests, attendance, & students' "on-track" indicators, see the UChicago Consortium playbook, [How can we understand students' progress in school?](#)

2

Effective principals build strong school-wide culture

Principals...

Create and communicate a **clear vision** for school

Set **high standards** for student learning:

- All students are expected to grow, learn, and achieve at their highest potential
- Curriculum and instruction is challenging
- All students are given the supports they need to do their best work

Support a **positive environment**

- Students feel safe, connected, respected, and valued
- Educators & staff report collaboration, trust, and a commitment to the school
- Families feel like valued partners

RESEARCH SAYS:

3

Effective principals create conditions where teachers can be most effective

Principals...

- Ensure **school-wide expectations** for students and teachers are clear—to teachers, students, and families
- **Organize & manage resources** to create the conditions for strong teaching and learning

Teachers...

- Feel safe, **connected, respected,** and valued
- Continue to **learn and grow** through learning opportunities, feedback, coaching, and mentoring
- Understand how district priorities **translate into practice**



Effective principals share leadership and invest in teacher leadership

Principals...

- Delegate meaningful **leadership roles** to teachers (e.g., department chairs, instructional coaches, or team leaders)
- **Connect different efforts** so teams aren't working in isolation
- Ensure teachers and support staff have **common planning & collaboration** time during the school day
- **Organize & motivate** teachers and school staff* to lead and work on shared goals for the school and students
 - There is a culture of collective responsibility and collaboration
 - There is a culture of trust where teachers feel valued and heard
 - There are many different people available to support students and families

*See more about “distributed leadership” on p.10.



What is distributed leadership?

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) encourages principals to implement a “distributed leadership” approach where principals, assistant principals, teachers, and other school staff share responsibilities to support students’ experiences & achievement.

The distributed leadership model leverages the expertise, connections, and contributions of multiple people, rather than relying on the principal alone.

Learn more about what “distributed leadership” can look like in practice:

- [CPS school leader evaluation rubric](#)
- [Local School Council principal evaluation form](#)



RESEARCH SAYS:

5 Effective principals find, advocate for, and manage resources and relationships

Principals...

Thoughtfully **bring in & develop resources** to support student learning & development:

- Teachers have high-quality curricula & supplies for their classrooms
- Students have access to programs through the district & outside partners

Make sure programs & resources in the school are **coordinated & connected** to a clear vision

- Carefully vet the initiatives & programs in the school

Manage **systems, operations, & relationships** well

- Ensure building & operations run smoothly
- Maintain strong relationships with school staff, community partners, parents, & CPS central office around shared goals

Schools with many unrelated & unsustained initiatives & programs show smaller gains than schools with coherent ones.

[Instructional Program Coherence: What It Is and Why It Should Guide School Improvement Policy](#)

6 Effective principals welcome and engage families

Principals...

- **Value families as key partners** for students' learning and development
- **Foster a culture** that values family engagement
 - Create meaningful opportunities for parent and family involvement
 - Provide opportunities for educators and staff to learn and develop best practices for engaging with families

What does this look like?

See p.13 for details

How can families work with principals to foster a welcoming school culture?

See p.16 for details

What does it look and feel like when families feel **connected** & **valued** at school?

- Feeling welcomed when coming to the school
- Understanding school vision, goals, activities, and resources
- Hearing frequently from teachers about what is happening in their child's classroom, including positive updates—not just concerns or problems
- Having clear ways to contact teachers and leaders, with timely replies
- Invitations for school involvement—in the classroom, at events, and in decision-making
- A consistent schedule of family events or activities throughout the school year, such as Open House nights or family workshops. These events can be in-person, but also have alternative channels that may allow more families to join
- Invitations to provide feedback and input on what is happening in the school



**Parents & families are
essential partners to
principals & schools**



PARENTS CAN...

1

**Get to know their school principal—
and full school leadership team.**

Parents can ask questions like...

Note: We use the term “parent” given CPS’s current designation of that seat on LSCs. We recognize that our students’ families come in many constellations and aim to collaborate with all individuals who play caregiving roles.

- **What is your vision for the school?**
 - How do different leadership teams contribute to it—like the Assistant Principal (AP), Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), behavioral health team (BHT), and Local School Council (LSC)?
 - Why are these curricula used? How are programs chosen? How are students and teachers supported? etc.
- **How do you make yourself available to families? How do you share those opportunities with families?**
 - This may include coffee chats, school dismissal time, LSC meetings, and State of the School session each fall
- **Which member of the leadership team is the best point of contact for my questions?**
 - Depending on your question or request, someone other than the principal may be able to help you better—and more quickly



PARENTS CAN...

2

Learn about the school's continuous improvement work plan (CIWP) and review school data.

Parents can ask questions like...

- How is CIWP driving work and resources in the building?
- What available school data is used by school teams and the LSC?
 - This may include the principal's monthly LSC report, 5Essentials Surveys, ISBE report card, and To&Through data



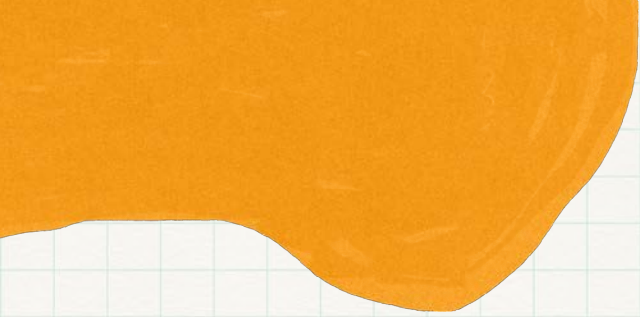
PARENTS CAN...

3

Work with principals to foster a welcoming school culture.

- Talk with the principal about the current state of family engagement and communication practices at your school
- Use tools and resources together toward a positive school culture
 - ex: Family Engagement Lab [reflection tool](#)
- Get involved in your [Parent Advisory Council](#), [Bilingual Advisory Committee](#), [LSC](#), or other [parent engagement opportunities](#)
- Ask, share, and discuss with other parents and families:
 - What do you care about?
 - What is your family experience like at the school?
 - What do we want to celebrate?
 - What do we want to change?





The **Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP)** sets the school's goals and priorities. The CIWP is approved and updated by the Local School Council (LSC) for each CPS school. It is a 3-year plan that also guides the school's budget. It is the school principal's duty to provide the LSC with CIWP updates throughout each school year.



Learn more about your CIWP at <https://cpsci.my.site.com/ciwp>

Learn more about LSCs at
<https://www.cps.edu/about/local-school-councils/>

Research insights for LSCs: Principal hiring, evaluation, & support

LSC members in Chicago—and board members in any district—can consider key research when hiring, evaluating, and developing support practices and policies for principals.



RESEARCH SAYS:

Principal training, hiring, supports, & pipelines: Many principals don't feel 100% ready for the role

LSCs can...

- Consider hiring former assistant principals; they are more likely to remain in the role years later
- Offer patience and support to new and first-time principals
- Together, consider what resources from CPS or other providers may best support them

Board members can...

- Strengthen principal training, supports, and pipelines
- Provide additional supports in schools with highest needs, where principals report more challenges
- Consider resources and policies that can reduce principal turnover

RESEARCH SAYS:

Competing priorities can fuel principal turnover

- In Chicago, principals report to both their Network Chief and their LSC
 - Principals must also work within bargaining agreements of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), and consider needs and requests from teachers, students, and families
- Stakeholders may have competing priorities and expectations for the principal, which may lead to stress, burnout, and turnover

LSCs can...

- Become familiar with CPS principal expectations and principal evaluation guides
- Understand challenges facing Illinois and CPS principals, and ask about your principal's challenges and vision

Board members can...

- Understand principals' needs and feedback
- Consider resources and policies that can reduce principal turnover

RESEARCH SAYS:

Principal turnover often has negative effects

It takes a new leader time to get to know staff and practices, and make adjustments for improvements.

Principal turnover often has negative effects, including on student achievement, teacher retention, and school culture—unless a much more effective principal replaces the prior one.

LSCs can...

- Balance the pros and cons of principal turnover when working with a principal who isn't meeting LSC expectations
 - Work with the school's network chief via the Office of Network Support—which provides resources & guidance for principals and schools
- Consider internal succession planning and pipelines for principal and assistant principal (AP) roles to minimize transition challenges

Board members can...

- Support policies, programs and practices that hire, support, and retain strong principals—including AP-to-principal pipeline—reducing the negative effects of principal turnover

RESEARCH SAYS:

Having school leaders who are representative of their student bodies and bias-aware is important—within schools, and across the district

- Attendance, gifted program enrollment, tests, and other outcomes are higher for students whose race/ethnicity is the same as their principal—likely because of high expectations and a positive environment
- Research shows that principals who have different backgrounds from their students can also improve outcomes, through intentional & antiracist approaches ([see p.48 here](#))

In CPS, 74% of Black and White students, and 34% of Latinx students, had principals of the same race/ethnicity in 2019-20.

LSCs can...

- Encourage principals to complete training, work with coaches, and use other resources to make sure they and their staff are holding high expectations and removing barriers for all students, and addressing unconscious biases

Board members can...

- Examine principal demographics, pathways to the principalship, and principal transitions in CPS
- Offer and support training, coaching, and resources aligned with the [CPS Equity Framework](#)



More resources for Local School Councils

- ★ Chicago Public Schools offers an [LSC Reference Guide](#) to support LSC members in navigating their role effectively. The Guide offers one-page summaries on various topics, including:
 - Continuous Improvement Work Plans (CIWP) guidance (p. 304)
 - An overview of the Principal Performance Evaluation (p. 308)
 - Principal selection (p. 310)
- ★ The Chicago Public Education Fund created resources to help LSCs navigate the principal hiring process, including a [hiring toolkit](#) and additional [LSC resources](#)

Data Dive





How can I use data to learn more about my school?

These data points are best used in **sparking questions & conversations** to understand what's happening at school, and what improvements can be made toward stronger student experiences & learning.

1

Find your school's CIWP (Continuous Improvement Work Plan)

- What is the school working on? Why?
- Where are we seeing progress?
- What needs remain? How are they being addressed?

2

5Essentials Survey results*

- What do teachers & students say about their school experiences?
- What areas have improved most?
- What areas have decreased most?
- What might be driving these responses—and what else do we need to ask & learn?

* More about *5Essentials* Survey data & reports for LSCs in this extra guide



How can I use data to learn more about my school?

3

CPS School Profiles

These new profiles include data & info related to school practices & student outcomes, including data about:

- Academic progress
- School climate
- Community engagement

4

To&Through elementary & high school data tools**

- What groups have high and low attendance, grades, and on-track rates?
- How can we learn about what students are experiencing and what they need?

** More about using To&Through tools for “on track” data in [this playbook’s](#) “data dive” section.



How can I use data to learn more about my school?

Outside Chicago, you can:

- Find publicly available district & state data
- Ask what data your school uses to monitor & support student success

5

Lived experiences

Principals and/or parents can ask parents and families about their experiences and ideas:

- What are your top questions, concerns, requests, and needs?
 - What support do you have in addressing those?
 - What else do you need?
 - How can we help?
- What bright spots do you see?
 - How can we celebrate those?
 - What can we learn from those?

6

ISBE report card

- What metrics are important to you, and how do they compare to similar or nearby schools, CPS averages, and state averages?
- See ISBE's [Reading Your School Report Card](#) for details



References

- Association of Washington School Principals. (2020). *The AWSPP leadership framework for school leader evaluation*. Olympia, WA: Association of Washington School Principals.
- Davis, L., Shyja, A., Hart, H., Gutiérrez, V., & Kheraj, N. (2021). *5Essentials Survey in CPS: Using school climate survey results to guide practice*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.
- Epstein, J.L., Sanders, M.G., Simon, B.S., Salinas, K.C., Jansorn, N.R., & Van Voorhis, F.L. (2002). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (2nd Ed.). Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement
- Gordon, M.F., Bohannon, A.X., Easton, J.Q., Blanchard, A., Sartain, L., & Smith, C. (2023). *On the path to becoming a Chicago public school principal*. Chicago, IL: NORC at the University of Chicago.
- Grissom, J.A., Egalite, A.J., & Lindsay, C.A. (2021). *How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research*. New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation.
- Grissom, J.A., & Loeb, S. (2011). *Triangulating principal effectiveness: How perspectives of parents, teachers, and assistant principals identify the central importance of managerial skills*. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(5), 1091-1123.
- Hanover Research (2020). *Action guide: High-performing schools*. Arlington, VA: Hanover Research.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K.V., Walker, J.M.T., Sandler, H.M., Whetsel, D., Green, C.L., Wilkins, A.S., & Closson, K. (2005). *Why do parents become involved? Research findings and implications*. *The Elementary School Journal*, 106(2), 105-130.
- Illinois Principals Association & The Chicago Public Education Fund. (2023). *The Illinois principal their work, their challenges, their impact*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Public Education Fund.



References, con't

- Newmann, F.M., Smith, B., Allensworth, E., & Bryk, A.S. (2001). Instructional program coherence: What it is and why it should guide school improvement policy. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 23(4), 297-321.
- Porter, S., Jackson, C.K., Kiguel, S., & Easton, J.Q. (2023). Investing in adolescents: High school climate and organizational context shape student development and educational attainment. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.
- Rivkin, S.G., Sartain, L., & Schiman, J. (2023). Training and retaining effective school leaders: Results from efforts to improve principal effectiveness in Chicago Public Schools. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.
- Sebastian, J., Allensworth, E., Wiedermann, W., Hochbein, C., & Cunningham, M. (2019). Principal leadership and school performance: An examination of instructional leadership and organizational management. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 18(4), 591-613.
- Shyjka, A. (2022). Reaching for improvement: Teacher evaluation and its role in instructional improvement. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.
- Smith, T.E., Reinke, W.M., Herman, K.C., & Sebastian, J. (2021). Exploring the link between principal leadership and family engagement across elementary and middle school. *Journal of School Psychology*, 84, 49-62.
- Spillane, J.P., & Lee, L.C. (2014). Novice school principals' sense of ultimate responsibility: Problems of practice in transitioning to the principal's office. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 50(3), 431-465.



How was this playbook developed?

The UChicago Consortium is working to help more parents and community leaders use research to support sustainable and long-lasting change in their school communities. We aim to center parents' lived experiences, and position research and data as a tool for ongoing conversations and collaborations. We use the term “parent” given Chicago Public School's (CPS) current designation of that seat on LSCs. We recognize that our students' families come in many constellations and aim to collaborate with all individuals who play caregiving roles.

We have worked with CPS district leaders and community-based organizations, including **COFI (Community Organizing and Family Issues; Raise Your Hand)**; and **Kids First Chicago**, alongside the **To&Through Project**, to consider how Consortium playbooks may support parents' efforts to help their school communities flourish.

This collaboration has included listening sessions, collaborative vision-setting for future playbooks' content, and feedback on drafted content. This is our third family playbook. You can find all family playbooks on the UChicago Consortium's [events & resources page](#).

This particular playbook benefitted from input from Kids First Chicago staff and parent leaders—Daniel Anello, Jessica Cañas, Nicholas Jones, Ana G. Lopez, Susana Perez, Denise Dyer, and Carrie Glaspe—and from colleagues who have been principals, worked with principals and/or led research related to principals in Chicago, including: Greg Jones, Brian Kelly, Krys Payne, Nate Pietrini, Jasmine Thurmond, Patricia Mota, Sydney Finley, and Molly Gordon. We thank them for their insights.

We are grateful for all of our partners and look forward to continued collaboration across Chicago. If you're interested in future collaboration, we'd love to hear from you at: consortiumpartners@uchicago.edu



Citation, contributors & acknowledgements

Suggested citation

UChicago Consortium on School Research. (2025). *Family playbook: Effective principal leadership*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

Contributors

Rosa Ramirez Richter

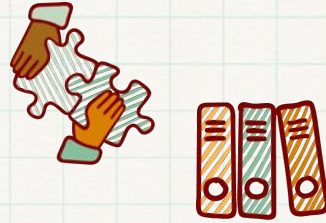
*Director of Partnerships &
Engagement, UChicago Consortium*

Jessica Tansey

*Managing Director of
Communications,
UChicago Consortium*

Acknowledgements

In addition to the collaboration with and feedback from our community partners, we are grateful to our colleagues, we are grateful to our colleagues Elaine Allensworth, Laura Davis, Vanessa Gutiérrez, Jenny Nagaoka, Shanette Porter, and Jessica Puller for their contributions to this playbook.



Learn more about how the work of the
UChicago Consortium on School Research
can help you and your school community at

<https://consortium.uchicago.edu/events-and-resources>

UCHICAGO Consortium
on School Research



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

**CROWN FAMILY SCHOOL OF
SOCIAL WORK, POLICY, AND PRACTICE**

Advancing a More Just and Humane Society