

Balanced Leadership[®]

Intervention Brief | School Leadership Topic Area

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WHAT WORKS
CLEARINGHOUSE[™]

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Research has shown that school leaders can substantially influence student outcomes, including student achievement, and that some school leaders improve student outcomes at a much faster rate than others do.¹ The strong influence of school leaders on student outcomes has led to the creation of student outcome–focused professional development programs for current and aspiring school leaders. *Balanced Leadership[®]* is one such professional development program. Current and aspiring school leaders participate in professional development sessions with trained facilitators over one or two years, practice what they learn between sessions, and can receive additional coaching and online support. McREL International, the company that developed the *Balanced Leadership[®]* program, based the framework

and content of the professional development on research identifying key actions and behaviors of school leaders that are associated with improved student outcomes.²

This What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) report, part of the WWC’s School Leadership topic area, explores the effects of *Balanced Leadership[®]* on student, teacher, and school leader outcomes. The WWC identified three studies of *Balanced Leadership[®]*. One of these studies meets WWC standards. The evidence presented in this report is from one study of the impact of *Balanced Leadership[®]* on school principals in schools with a range of grades—from kindergarten to grade 12—in rural school districts in the state of Michigan.

What Happens When School Leaders Participate in *Balanced Leadership[®]*?

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- **May increase school leader retention at the school**

Findings on *Balanced Leadership[®]* from the one study that met WWC standards are shown in Table 1. For the one outcome in this study that met WWC standards, the table reports

on the performance of the *Balanced Leadership[®]* intervention group relative to the comparison group and the number of studies and principals that contributed to the finding.

Table 1. Summary of findings on *Balanced Leadership[®]* from the one study that meets WWC Standards

Outcome domain	Effectiveness rating	Average performance (study findings)		Evidence meeting WWC standards (version 4.0)	
		Intervention group	Comparison group	Number of studies	Number of principals
School leader retention at the school	Potentially positive effects	76% retained	60% retained	1	124

Note: The average performance (study findings) values are based on an analysis of one outcome measure that meets WWC standards, reported by Jacob et al. (2015). The effects of *Balanced Leadership[®]* are not known for other outcomes within the School Leadership topic area, including student achievement, student progress in school, social-emotional learning and behavior, instructional practice, leadership practice, teacher retention, or measures of school leader retention in the district, state, or teaching profession.

BOX 1. HOW THE WWC REVIEWS AND DESCRIBES EVIDENCE

The WWC evaluates evidence based on the quality and results of reviewed studies. The criteria the WWC uses for evaluating evidence are defined in the [Procedures and Standards Handbooks](#) and the [Review Protocols](#). The studies summarized in this report were reviewed under WWC Standards (version 4.0) and the School Leadership topic area protocol (version 4.0).

To determine the effectiveness rating, the WWC considers what methods each study used, the direction of the effects, and the number of studies that tested the intervention. The higher the effectiveness rating, the more certain the WWC is about the reported results and about what will happen if the same intervention is implemented again. The following key explains the relationship between effectiveness ratings and the statements used in this report:

Effectiveness Rating	Rating interpretation	Description of the evidence
Positive (or negative) effects	The intervention is <i>likely</i> to change an outcome	Strong evidence of a positive effect, with no overriding contrary evidence
Potentially positive (or negative) effects	The intervention <i>may</i> change an outcome	Evidence of a positive effect with no overriding contrary evidence
No discernible effects	The intervention <i>may result in little to no change</i> in an outcome	No affirmative evidence of effects
Mixed effects	The intervention <i>has inconsistent effects</i> on an outcome	Evidence includes studies in at least two of these categories: studies with positive effects, studies with negative effects, or more studies with indeterminate effects than with positive or negative effects

How is *Balanced Leadership*[®] Implemented?

The following section provides details of how *Balanced Leadership*[®] was implemented. This information can help educators identify the requirements for implementing *Balanced Leadership*[®] and determine whether implementing this intervention would be feasible in their district or school. Information on *Balanced Leadership*[®] presented in this section comes from the study that meets WWC standards (Jacob et al., 2015) and from correspondence with the developer.

- **Goal:** *Balanced Leadership*[®] aims to improve student outcomes by helping current and aspiring school leaders understand and implement a set of actions and behaviors of school leaders that may be associated with improved student outcomes.
- **Target population:** The *Balanced Leadership*[®] program reviewed in this report is intended for principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, and others responsible for school-level leadership in schools serving kindergarten through grade 12. A separate *Balanced Leadership*[®] program offered by the developer seeks to engage district-level leaders.
- **Method of delivery:** *Balanced Leadership*[®] instructional specialists provide professional development to groups of school leaders during in-person sessions offered at a location the school district provides or in a central location if multiple districts are participating together (referred to as the consortium model). School leaders can receive additional one-on-one coaching and online support. In the study

Comparison group: In the study that contributes to this intervention report, principals in the comparison group received their school or district’s standard professional development offerings. Several comparison group principals described attending a program with content similar to *Balanced Leadership*[®].

- that contributes to this intervention report, the sessions took place in two central locations close to the participating school districts.
- **Frequency and duration of service:** The program is customizable, and the number of sessions offered depends on what the school or district requests. In the study that contributes to this intervention report, principals attended 10 sessions, each of which was offered over 2 days. Though the program is offered over 2 years, the sessions in this study took place across parts of 3 school years. The study does not describe any additional coaching or online support provided by the program.
 - **Intervention components:** *Balanced Leadership*[®] includes several components, as noted in Table 2. A separate program for district-level leaders, which can be bundled with the school-level leader program, is also described below, but was not the subject of the study that contributes to this intervention report.

Table 2. Components of *Balanced Leadership*[®]

Key component	Description
Framework for actions and behaviors of school leaders	The professional development focuses on 21 specific actions and behaviors of school leaders that may be associated with improved student outcomes, including designing and implementing school curriculum, instruction, and assessment; fostering shared beliefs and community; and monitoring teaching and student learning.
On-site professional learning for school leaders in year one	During the first year, current or aspiring school leaders are offered between one and four two-day on-site professional learning sessions focused on the 21 specific actions and behaviors that may be associated with improved student outcomes. The first session provides an overview of the program and each of the actions and behaviors of school leaders. The second through fourth sessions, in turn, focus on learning how to initiate and lead school change, maintain a focus on school performance, and foster shared beliefs and a purposeful school community. The structured training sessions are offered using a case study approach, in which participants read about and reflect on real-life applications of the leadership framework.
On-site professional learning for school leaders in year two	For schools that participate in 2 years of the program, sessions in the second year focus on extending and refining the topics covered in the first year through group discussions, case studies, and action plans. These activities are offered over two to six professional learning sessions, each offered over 2 days. Coaching and additional online supports are available throughout the program as requested by the school or district.
Training for district staff	The program can also include professional development for district-level leaders, for example, superintendents or assistant superintendents, who oversee multiple schools. The district-level training, provided over 1 to 4 days, focuses on setting goals, strategies for supporting school leaders, and effective management practices. District staff can also become trained facilitators in the <i>Balanced Leadership</i> [®] program themselves, in order to sustain the program in their districts over time.

What Does *Balanced Leadership*[®] Cost?

The cost of participating in *Balanced Leadership*[®] varies depending on the number of school leaders being trained and the extent of program customization. The program can be implemented using a consortium training model, in which school leaders from multiple districts attend the training in a central location, to lower program costs to individual districts. The preliminary list of cost drivers in this section is not designed to be exhaustive; rather, it provides educators an overview of the major resources needed to implement *Balanced Leadership*[®]. Actual program costs are only available in consultation with the developer. The information described below is based on the information available as of July 2019.

- **Equipment and materials costs:** Participants receive activity guides, manuals, and access to online resources as part of the contracted cost.
- **Personnel costs:** McREL provides facilitators to lead *Balanced Leadership*[®] professional learning sessions and

coaching activities. Each participating school leader joins up to 10 professional learning sessions over 2 years, and additional coaching sessions are available as part of the contracted cost.

- **Facilities costs:** Professional development activities occur in a school or administrative building in the school leaders’ district. For the consortium training model, the training occurs in a centrally located facility provided by one of the districts, or a regional education agency. Schools and districts are responsible for transportation to and from these locations.
- **Costs paid by students or parents:** None.
- **In-kind supports:** None.
- **Sources of funding:** Schools and districts usually cover the contracted costs for *Balanced Leadership*[®] using general funds or any grant funds they may have available.

For More Information:

About *Balanced Leadership*[®]

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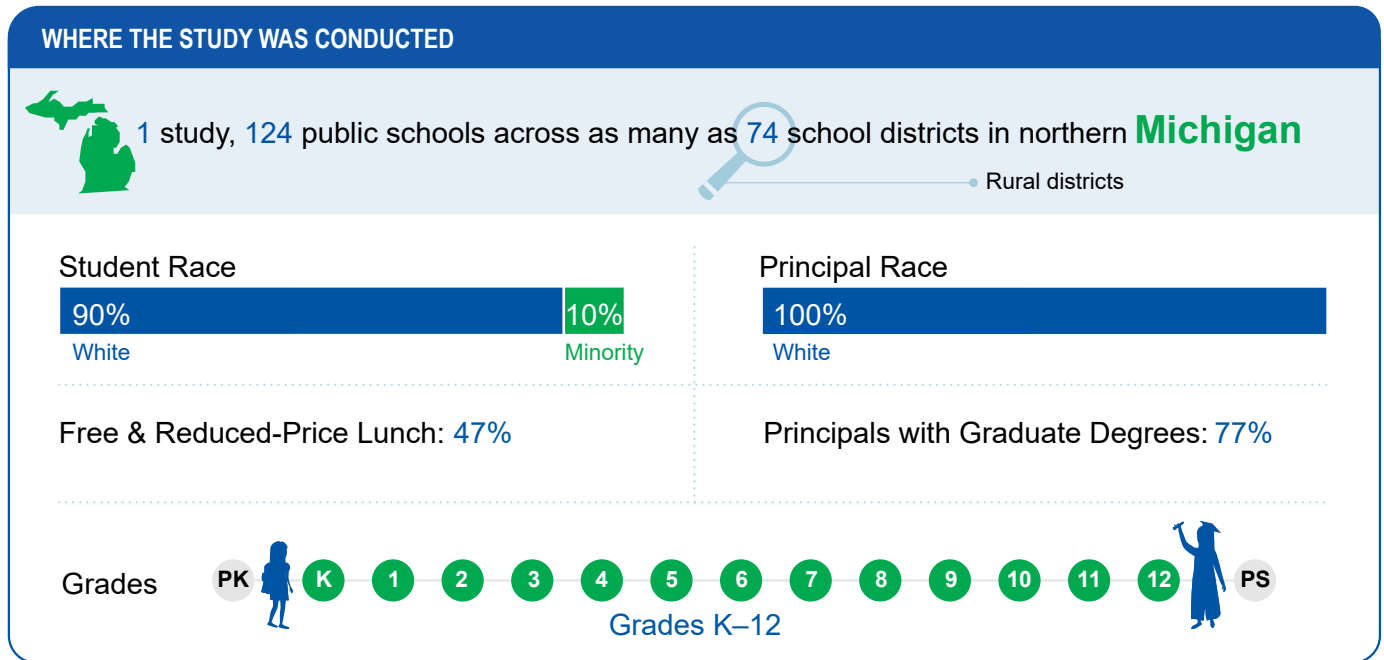
About the cost of the intervention

Actual program costs are only available in consultation with the developer.

In What Context Was *Balanced Leadership*[®] Studied?

The following section provides information on the setting of the one study of *Balanced Leadership*[®] that meets WWC standards, and a description of the participants in the research. This information can help educators understand

the context in which the study of *Balanced Leadership*[®] was conducted, and determine whether the program might be suitable for their setting.



LEARN MORE



Read more about the *Balanced Leadership*[®] intervention and the studies that are summarized here in the [Intervention Report](#).

Endnotes

¹ Several studies describe differences across school leaders in their impacts on student achievement, including [Dhuey and Smith \(2018\)](#); [Branch et al. \(2012\)](#); and [Leithwood et al. \(2004\)](#).

² The research that McREL International used to identify the actions and behaviors of school leaders associated with improved student outcomes includes *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results* ([Marzano et al. 2005](#)). A review of this research by the WWC is beyond the scope of this review.