

Webinar Transcript: Understanding Administrator Retention, Mobility, and Attrition

Regional Educational
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Central

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Overview

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Transcript

JOHN LOPEZ: Good morning or good afternoon, everyone, depending on where you are. And welcome to the REL Central Webinar, Understanding Administrator Retention, Mobility and Attrition. I'm John Lopez, Senior Education Improvement Specialist at REL Central.

And on behalf of the rest of our team, whom you'll meet shortly, we want to appreciate you taking the time to spend some time with us today to join us as we explore this critical topic of administrator mobility. And that seems particularly relevant in today's environment, with all of the changes that have been going on in the last year or so. So let's deal with some administrative details first of all.

You see here there this call is being live captioned. So we'd ask you to copy and paste the link sent to you in the chat box so you can take advantage of the service. You shouldn't need to do too much. It should be a pre-populated sign-in page. So please click Register. And at that point, you should be good to go.

So hopefully that works well for you. That's one of the major administrative pieces we wanted to take care of before we get started. The second thing relates to our Q&A, which is to reduce

background noise, we mute all participants. And the chat has been disabled, but we'd like you to communicate with us by using the Q&A box.

Please feel free to share your questions, comments. We'll be asking you to respond to a question in a little bit here, so stay tuned. So yes, at any moment, share that with us. And you should see in the top left corner of your screen is where you can insert anything into that box and we will respond accordingly. Once again, thank you for joining us.

Let me give you a little bit of background here about REL Central. We primarily serve a seven state region. The states you see there listed is Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, and Wyoming. That said, all of us in education ultimately pursue in all states informed decision-making that positively impacts school systems and ultimately the students we serve.

REL Central is operated by Marzano Research, which is an applied evidence-based research organization that integrates training, coaching, and technical support to meet the range of our client, partner, and stakeholder needs. So that's kind of who we are. Again, thank you for joining. And we're going to talk a little bit, on the next slide, about what fueled this webinar.

There's several partnerships and alliances that comprise REL Central. And the Educator Pipeline Research Alliance focuses primarily on educator preparation, evaluation, and mobility. And that alliance has been somewhat active in terms of pushing the agenda here in the last couple years.

In 2019, REL Central published a teacher mobility study. And in 2020, we published the admin mobility study, which will be the focus of our conversation today. So that's a little bit of the larger picture as to who we are and what fueled this conversation, how we got to this point. We want to take a few minutes out to meet some of us. Josh Stewart is one of our lead senior managing senior researchers. I, again, am John Lopez. And we have two very well-experienced presenters joining us today, Jim Masters and Ken Haptonstall. They have many, many years as school and district leaders, so I'm going to turn it over to each of them to give us a quick overview. Let me start with Ken.

KEN HAPTONSTALL: Yeah, good morning, everybody. Ken Haptonstall. I'm the executive director of the Colorado River BOCES, which is in Western Colorado. Previously I served as

superintendent in Mesa County, which is a district of about 23,000 kids. And prior to that in a district of about 1,200 kids.

So I've served in both kind of an urban setting, rural, in Western Colorado, and then a small rural setting. So I had some experiences in both those types of settings. And my superintendency has covered a span of about 15 years. I've had some experience doing that kind of work. And previous to that was a middle school principal.

So I'm looking forward to the conversation today with Jim and everybody else. And this is an exciting topic, especially right now where we are in the world of COVID. So Jim, I'll hand it over to you.

JIM MASTERS: Thank you, Ken. Jim Masters. I currently serve as the coordinator of educator evaluation and training for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. My primary responsibilities are to oversee the implementation of the Missouri Leadership Development system, which for us is a progressive, sequential system of professional learning for principals from aspiring to retiring. That's our elevator speech, and it sums it up pretty well.

My experience prior to coming to the department was 31 years in K-12 education, where I served as a teacher, as a coach, as a middle school principal, some special ed process coordinating in there, as well as a year as an interim elementary principal, which was interesting. And then wrapped up my last 12 years in pre-K-12 as a superintendent in two small, rural school districts in Northeast Missouri. So looking forward to sharing whatever insights Missouri can offer relative to how we're supporting and working to develop principals. And hope that you all find that useful. Thank you.

JOHN LOPEZ: Thank you, gentlemen. Appreciate that. And we look forward to our upcoming conversations. But now that our participants know something about us, we want to get to know some of you.

So we're going to ask you to respond to this question, again using your Q&A. The question is, what is your role within your organization? And you see the options of educators, leader, district leader, school board member, state administrator, official, or policymaker, or the ever popular 'other'. So if you would you please share with us.

And we should be getting some information here back in terms of the diversity of experiences that you bring to our conversation today. So yes, we have a very diverse group. We see quite a bit of ‘other’, we see some policymakers.

Not surprisingly, every group is represented. We see some administrators, officials. It's a good group we have here. We should have various lenses through which to examine the topic and have a rich conversation.

So let's talk a little bit about the goals today. And shortly you should see a link to the report, if you don't already have it. So what we essentially want to do is share with you an overview of the study, present some of the findings. And then you just heard from Jim and Ken about their vast experience.

We're going to tap into their knowledge and experiences, as well as some of your questions, to have conversations that touch on how practitioners might use those findings, have they used those findings, and if so, to what extent. We'll ask Jim and Ken to make connections between the report and their experiences from a policy and/or practice perspective. And then just general insights about how best to retain administrators. And I know that you'll want to hear later on some of the specifics and the success from Jim's program in Missouri.

So that's what we hope to do today. I anticipate we'll cover a lot of ground. And so moving into the background of this study, and we'll also talk about the relevance as a subset of the background. So the relevance of the study, as we said, is driven by the Ed Pipeline Research Alliance from three particular states for this study-- from the Alliance members from Colorado, Missouri, and South Dakota.

And the what—so, generally speaking, there's a lot to know about retention, mobility, and attrition. But we specifically wanted to look at the reasons and the characteristics of mobility and attrition. And then lastly, the topic is important, and Ken just restated this, mobility and attrition of school district leaders, particularly at a time like this, have been associated with the consequences for schools and students.

For example, principal departure is associated with lower student achievement and higher teacher turnover. We also know the costs of turnover. And those are difficult to anticipate, but we know there is a cost, not only financially. And then also in a larger scale, when you have leadership mobility, there tend to be interruptions in implementing school improvement activities. So now we're talking in more long-range mid-term, or long-term implications.

So we're going to cover those things today, but we're going to begin with looking at the research questions that guided some of the topics we'll touch on. So the title of this webinar is Understanding Administrator Retention, Mobility, and Attrition. And by administrator, we're talking about school leaders.

And for this study, we're talking about assistant principals and principals. And for district leaders, we're talking about assistant superintendent and superintendents. So that's kind of foundation of from whom we're going to-- from which lens we'll be talking about the findings today.

In terms of the data set, between 2015 and '16, and 2018 and '19, we looked at about 6,300 assistant principals and principals, and about 1,300 assistant superintendents and superintendents. So that's the, in terms of question 1 and 2, what percentage of school leaders were stayers, movers, or leavers. And then-- question 1, I'm sorry. Then question 2 is the same question to district leaders.

Question 3 takes us on a little bit different path, but quite important, particularly to the findings that we'll present later. Question 3 looks at the characteristics of the principals, and then school and district characteristics that are associated with principals being a mover or a leaver. And we focus on principals, because they comprise the single largest group of ed leaders, thereby the largest single set of data with which to work to talk about the factors related to mobility and attrition.

So having covered that, the research questions hopefully that gives a good sense of where we're headed. And in the next slide, we'll talk a little bit more specifically about the definitions that were a part of the research questions. Those are stayers.

Stayers remain in their administrative position in the same school. Movers transfer to an administrative position in a different school or district. And then leavers decided to take a non-administrative position or leave their school public system altogether. They're a little bit more difficult to track, but that's how we define the three different categories related to mobility and attrition.

So that, again, provides a layout. And now we're going to jump to sharing some of the findings, as well as transition to actual conversation. So you won't hear from just me. We'll leverage the expertise of Jim and Ken.

So on the next slide, we will see that the first conversation that happens, when do school and district leaders leave? And so this slide demonstrates what some have thought is kind of not preferable by any stretch. We see that after three years, it's about 46% of principals are movers or leavers. And then after three years, about 44% of superintendents were movers or leavers.

So what this means is about every three years, there's significant change in leadership. And that becomes somewhat challenging, at least through my personal eyes, and then we'll hear from Jim and Ken, in terms of continuity, improvement, school improvement over the mid-and-long-term. I think it's fair to say that we would like to do everything possible to reduce those percentages.

So here's where we'd like to ask you to participate and formulate some questions while we leverage the experience of Jim and Ken. So gentlemen, there are any number of ways we can talk about those data, the results of this study. I'm going to open it up to you to share, from your perspectives, what's most striking, or when you first read this, what did you walk away with thinking?

KEN HAPTONSTALL: You want to start, Jim?

JIM MASTERS: Sure. It's one thing for research. I'm not sure that those of us who have been in education for a while are ever truly surprised by findings. But it's so good to discover that your intuitions and your experience is not an outlier, and that there are some consistencies in there.

And what we have found in Missouri is that, in general, our principal mobility piece in terms of movers, leavers, and stayers pretty well paralleled what you see nationally. On the upside of that,

what we've been excited to note is that now over the course of four years of the implementation of the Missouri Leadership Development System, for those principals who participate, we have a 95% retention rate over four years. And so we feel like there's something positive about our efforts. I don't believe that we have found the solution, but I do believe that our efforts certainly touch on some of those things that drive school and district leaders to either move or to leave the administrative role.

KEN HAPTONSTALL: Yeah, I would agree with Jim. I think the validation is there. And that's an important piece.

When I had looked at this data, something that kind of struck me was I think back when I started my administrative career 20 years ago. And there were principals in buildings who had been there for 15 or 20 years, and superintendents who'd been in districts for 15-plus years. And over time, that has just seemed to fade away.

And whether that's a direct relation to accountability and all the necessary duties that are now upon administrators that weren't maybe back then, and the stress and pressure of that, I think that may be part of it. I would say there's-- and we'll talk about it a little bit more later, I think-- is just some of the revolving door board issues and contractual issues with superintendents tend to be movers with people who get into the superintendency and get out very quickly. So I think there's a lot of factors that play into that. I'm really excited to hear Jim's data around their training, because I feel like one of the things that we've lacked in Colorado is any kind of real substantive approach to training new administrators.

I often hear about brand new folks who get into the role of an assistant principal, typically, and are just overwhelmed by all the discipline they have to do, the lack of real relationships they can build with kids and with staff, because they spend most of their time telling parents how bad their children are. And they don't get a lot of that time to really interact in a positive manner. So I think to have some training that would help support new folks would be great.

And then, again, I think one of the things that we really need is just some sort of approach that helps people through those first three to five initial years of doing this work. Because regardless of the coursework you take, it's probably not going to be comprehensive enough to cover every detail of what you're going to have to do.

JIM MASTERS: You know, Ken, you were you were commenting, and it made me think about the recent information released from the Wallace study. And one of the pieces that really stood out for us was the fact that our new principals are coming to us with less classroom experience than they have in the past.

So when you couple the younger, less experienced, and the loss of those 12, 15, 20 year principals, I think the implications for our districts are profound. And so finding a way to support in multiple ways, whether they're thinking about getting a degree, or if they already have the job, finding ways to hang on to them and not eat them alive is going to be an important aspect moving forward.

KEN HAPTONSTALL: Yeah, I would agree with that, Jim. And one of the things I thought about is I read a study a long time ago-- I think Tim Waters and Bob Marzano did it-- was just on the amount of time it takes to actually move a system in terms of leadership in a system, and continuity. And it's typically five to seven years. And yet most of our evaluation systems, most of our accountability systems are built on a year-to-year or a three-year clock.

Superintendent contracts are typically on a three-year clock. So if people are really leaving the profession or moving out of a building after three years on average, you're not going to have continuity to make changes that really will support good, quality student learning. So it's concerning to say the least.

JIM MASTERS: Ken, you raise an interesting point. One of the studies we've looked at-- actually, it's a little bit dated. I think it's six or seven years old now. But North Carolina did a review of principal replacements over the course of about 10 or 12 years, and found that when a principal was removed for a lack of academic progress, when they were removed and a new principal came in, for the first two years there was a decrease in overall student achievement within those districts, and then a slow return.

But at no time over the course of the next five years did they ever get back to the level where the original principal was. And so if you get involved in that, and as you noted, principal turnover is so high and they're not there for that five to seven years, we recognize there are pieces they can put in place early, and to demonstrate some initial improvement. But if you're going to try and

anchor it in policy, practice, and tradition, it takes time. And right now our system simply isn't benefiting from that.

JOHN LOPEZ: If I can jump in here for just a second to share, in the Q&A we see a response, a comment I should say, that is in concert with what you're both saying. Once you've been in this system long enough, for a set amount of time, you're no longer surprised at the data, but-- you're no longer shocked at the data. But there was a surprise, one of our participants commented that he was a little surprised that the number of leavers was as high as it was, as opposed to just movers.

And then the second thing I wanted to throw in and get just a couple of responses from each of you if you can, last week there was a Colorado Education Association news release that said they had surveyed their members. And of those surveyed, about 40% said they were thinking of not returning to teaching after this year. So in context of it's difficult to have a long-term impact, when 10 years, or so to speak, is so short, when you hear a figure like that, what are your initial thoughts?

KEN HAPTONSTALL: Well, I can tell you, I run an alternative licensure program through my BOCES. And we had initially anticipated having about 30 candidates this year. And we're up to almost 60. It's hugely concerning.

But I would say right now, public education went from being the heroes in the spring to being trod on, to say the least, because schools aren't open, or they are open, or they require masks, or they don't require masks. And whether it's the teachers getting the blame for that, or the principal or the superintendent, is really irrelevant. And I think teachers are tired. I think they're very tired.

And right now would be a time for people to take special note and thank a teacher, because if 40% of the teachers in Colorado bail, we have nowhere near-- I think there's nine-- I can't remember the total amount of teachers in Colorado. But I can tell you right now, we would only produce maybe 10% of replacements out of our institutions. So that would leave a huge void. So that's very concerning.

JIM MASTERS: I think when you take the fact that that many people are considering leaving the profession and not returning to the classroom, and compound that with the fact that you don't

have people entering preparation programs and what have you, the long-term implications are frightening. You ask for comments. And I'm thinking that in some people's minds, I couldn't repeat what I was thinking out loud in a public forum.

But fortunately-- I shared this earlier with you all before the webinar started-- we had the occasion to meet with a group of superintendents from all across the state just a couple of days ago. And that same statistic was shared. And almost to a person, they all indicated they're not seeing that level.

But certainly, people have been giving it a lot of thought. And so if it's in the back of people's minds, what happens when a better offer comes along? Then where does that leave us? And if there's not a sufficient pipeline to replace those people, to say nothing of the lost experience that walks out the door, that leaves our students in a bind, not just from a leadership standpoint as far as the adults in the room are concerned, but from the standpoint of interrupted learning opportunities, kids waiting for adults to get their act together kind of really is cause for concern.

KEN HAPTONSTALL: Maybe just to add to that, too, because I think-- we're talking about teachers, but I can tell you, in Colorado, of the 10 largest school districts, right now I think six maybe seven of those superintendencies will open. That's hugely concerning, because when you have leadership essentially making the choice to retire or leave, do whatever they're doing, other folks follow. And so I think that's going to be a concern this year.

I heard the other day that we're up to 40 openings already in Colorado for superintendencies out of 178. So there's going to be a huge shift in leadership and governance culture in our state. And there's not a lot of people really running to the doors to be superintendents lately either. So that's going to have an impact.

JIM MASTERS: Yeah, I don't think there are many people that have seen what superintendents have gone through this last year saying, I want some of that. It's been just truly a challenge, a whitewater kind of situation. And you know, I think long-term, a piece, Ken, that your comments prompted me to consider was if you think about the traditional feeder pipeline for building level administration, and ultimately district level leadership, it's teachers.

They are the rootstock of those folks who eventually move into administrative positions. And we hope to benefit from their experience. But it would seem to me that some of the findings from that Wallace study, and then just practical experience, and what we hear from our folks is that their principals are coming to them with less experience. And the number of candidates just isn't out there.

JOHN LOPEZ: Now, gentlemen, this has sparked some great conversation. Jim, when we get to later in the presentation, in the webinar, I would want you to speak a little bit more about what did you learn about new admin support and preparation that led to your impressive numbers as it relates to the MLDS. But we can get to that a little bit.

But the next-- there was a previous question about differences in attrition rates among educators of different backgrounds. We're not going to address that exactly today, but we can. But I want to get to the next slide, because it starts to speak toward that.

What we see here, we've addressed the when do they leave. Now the question is, why do they leave? So we see here-- now, let me preface this, because there's potentially a lot to unpack.

What we're looking at here are the characteristics of principals and then school and district characteristics most strongly associated with being a mover or leaver after three years. So once again, we are focusing on principals on the left side of this graphic, because they provide the most robust data with which to work. And I would share that these characteristics are listed in order of strength of association.

So we begin to see that for principals, age, race and ethnicity, and salary tend to be relatively important in terms of likely to be a mover or leaver. And for school and district characteristics, those districts where performance, the school improvement status, meaning in need of improvement and identified as such by the state, and then district enrollment are also factors-- are characteristics that promote the increase in the likelihood of leaving. There is a lot to unpack there as well.

But we'll give our participants a second to take a longer look at that slide and digest some of that. And then we can move to the next slide, where we'll ask, again, please send us your questions. And then we'll ask a couple of questions of Jim and Ken.

I will say that in the context of COVID, this conversation, all of these conversations, potentially take on a different light or add a little bit more importance in terms of ferreting out what's to be learned from the study. So having seen those factors that are most important, again, age, salary, and ethnicity, some questions about, again, gentlemen, what first jumps out or comes to you through the lens of having been a district leader, and you see those data as a result of a study?

KEN HAPTONSTALL: Yeah, there's a lot in there to unpack. You're right, John. Obviously, you can think about somebody who's getting older and they decide they want to retire or do whatever, I think in terms of that younger mobility rate with people, they tend to get into jobs to get their feet wet. A lot of times, people will take jobs and positions where it may be in a small system, and then they move to a bigger system that maybe is more affluent.

The thing I always caution people is make sure you're a good fit for the job. Don't just take a job, because that can be really damaging to both kids and you, frankly, for your career. And I think a lot of times we're throwing really young principals into title [INAUDIBLE] schools, low SES, a lot of issues, the performance is low. And they either get burnt out or they get chewed up pretty quickly, because those schools are tough.

But you have some the rise to the occasion. And then the sad thing is that we either make them district employees or we shift them over to a school that may be more affluent. And really, some of those people are really made to work in those-- they have the right mentality and the right thinking around working with kiddos who are really struggling.

So I mean, like you say, the data is so rich and there's so much there. And I would really like to get into the movers part of that with race and ethnicity, because I tend to-- that one really concerns me. And I would just pick on superintendents in Colorado, 178 of them, and there's probably a handful that are people of color.

And I wonder if there's some level of just the brotherhood that comes with being superintendents, is that really extended? And do we support in the way we should? And that really concerns me. And I think we need to look into that a little deeper and maybe get more data on that part.

JIM MASTERS: I think from our perspective here in Missouri, the data that you all have with your study is really borne out in our experience, particularly in schools with academic challenges. I always hesitate to call a school a CSI school. It's a designation based on an assessment.

Doesn't mean that quality work is not being done there. Doesn't mean that people, the teachers and the leadership, isn't poring every ounce of effort they have into creating better opportunities for students. However, there are circumstances unique to those schools that impact overall student performance, but also, relative to who they're able to select as leaders. Because if you're a young leader looking to build a career, you might not be looking to go to a school that has some distinct and long-term academic challenges.

And what we're seeing is very often, you have a person who becomes a principal that got the job because nobody else applied. And central office went looking, OK, who within our current setting is really doing a good job with kids, and would they consider becoming a principal? And then, once they are in that particular mode, how long do they stay?

And Ken mentioned the fact that they look for opportunities. And the reality is talent is in great demand. And when they have the opportunity to move to other districts and share the benefit of what they know and can do, it leaves those districts as a bit of a revolving door in trying to secure long-term leadership that's truly going to make a sustainable difference.

KEN HAPTONSTALL: One thing you said there Jim, I think a lot about rural placements and finding people in some of those spots. And we have districts that they'll send out all sorts of positions to recruit. They'll not get any applicants.

And I think when they're trying to find a principal, a lot of times it's some homegrown talent. And maybe they've never had formal training in being an administrator at all. And maybe after a couple years, they decide that's not really their bailiwick for sure.

And you have a bunch of [INAUDIBLE] schools in Missouri, we have a bunch in Colorado. And oftentimes when we have meetings and you're talking to folks, they may have taught a year or two, and then they're thrust into the principalship and/or even a superintendency that can be

pretty overwhelming. And those are the kind of people I hope we could wrap some better supports around.

And I think currently the idea of mentoring or grooming new individuals to come into leadership positions is so heavily dependent on demographics. I mean, in Missouri, when the fundamental structure is predominantly white, the opportunity for people who don't look like the rest of the folks that are in the front office, that limits-- not that anybody is deliberately saying, well, no, not that one, but just the natural flow of things. It takes a concerted effort to go and find those leaders.

I go back to my own experience in asking a young applicant if they were ready to be the first black principal in our elementary school in one of the districts I served as superintendent. He came back the next day and said, no, I'm not. And so the idea of identifying talent wherever it may reside, and then in a very intentional way, grooming that, cultivating that to the betterment of our students' opportunities is a critical piece. And it's going to take that deliberate effort to find those folks and bring them along.

JOHN LOPEZ: This is a-- thank you for the opportunity to follow up on that, Jim. We do have a comment from one of the participants. And I'm quoting here, "maybe the pipeline needs to be interrupted. The disparities and inequalities caused by systemic racism have been further intensified by the pandemic." So I think that gentleman is very much in tune with what you just suggested.

We had a couple other comments. I responded to one of them in terms of, was there more specificity about the 'why' related to some of the findings and the characteristics? But I think that in order to get to the other questions that I think are really relevant, and Jim, we're going to ask you to a little bit more about the MLDS in a little bit, but let's go to the next slide, where we can have a conversation about, how can we better retain school and district leaders?

Throughout, to this point, we've touched on ideas and thoughts that could advance-- or reduce, I should say, mobility and attrition. But from the study, strategies identified as being supportive for school leader retention, we see them there. And this list is not in order of association. And these were not direct findings from that study, because these factors were not tested. These are implications from the literature view, and all of the data that were collected.

So how best to-- how can we better retain school and district leaders is the subsequent question, therefore, for you gentlemen. Thoughts? And in the next slide, I think we have a question or two queued up. But again, we've had-- love to hear from the participants who have been very good about dropping questions and comments into Q&A.

KEN HAPTONSTALL: Yeah, I'll leave it to Jim to talk about the work they're doing in Missouri, because I think that support structure is fascinating and really super helpful.

JIM MASTERS: We get that question fairly often. And you'd like to be able to say, well, we're just that smart. And the reality is, it has taken the concerted effort to take a look at research, to tap into practical experience, to bring just a wide variety of people to the table in terms of experts relative to leadership learning. The heads of our administrative associations across the state, practitioners, both building level as well as district level leaders, and getting a handle on some of those things that we know impacts principal retention and mobility.

And for us, I think part of that really comes down to focusing on a handful of things with great intention. Part of that is to maintain just learning opportunities beyond the first or second year. I think that everybody recognizes the importance and the value of professional learning for principals. However, you don't find many programs that extend beyond that second year.

We want to give them a lot of attention early, but where's the piece for that maturing leader when they know and have better questions to ask, or they've encountered more difficult problems, or if there are those nagging dilemmas that refuse to go away and they're needing thought partners and what have you? And I think that leads into the next part of that is the fact that our system really creates a network, regionally located, where people can tap into the experience and thinking of their peers. And so they have a venue. They're no longer as isolated in their position.

We've often talked about principals, how often, as a superintendent, did I ever have a principal come to me and say, you know, Jim, man, this first semester is really kicking my butt. And I know it's like a week before Thanksgiving, but I think if I could just take between now and Christmas to get my head back in it, I could come back and do a really great job second semester. Nobody's going to acknowledge that to their supervisor.

And yet, we know that it is a reality. And so how do you have things in place that help them navigate those difficult times? And I think one of the pieces I'd like to emphasize about the Missouri Leadership Development System is it is not how to be a principal. It focuses on leadership concepts and principles, and really works on developing a keener understanding, a deeper understanding of the knowledge, the skills, and the dispositions necessary to effectively lead.

And then from those principles and understandings, you have the tools to respond to the questions and challenges that emerge as your school year unfolds. And so if I had to narrow it down to two or three items, I would have to say it is the opportunity to no longer work in isolation. It is the opportunity to continually build on your learning, both from what we offer and present, and then couple that with what your experience is teaching you. And then the idea that it's really about adult learning and helping them develop the knowledge, the skills, and the dispositions to hang in there and do what needs to be done.

KEN HAPTONSTALL: Yeah, I can't tell you how refreshing that is, Jim. When I think in Colorado, we have a professional organization that we have conferences three or four times a year. But to really dig into the skills and dispositions of leadership isn't something that really happens. And I think that's critical.

As I think back on some of the points, John, that you had on the slide, we read a book I don't know how many years ago, Daniel [INAUDIBLE]. But really thinking about how you envelop somebody in a culture of learning, in a culture of your workspace, and really allowing people to be part of the decision-making process. And I know as a leader, when I ask people to be a part of making decisions and supporting decisions, and a lot of times they were their decisions.

In fact, I always used to kind of use an inverted pyramid approach to leadership, where I was at the bottom of that little point trying to help people get accomplished what they needed to do to be successful. And to really support their decisions and be able to work in a collaborative manner in their schools, and therefore, support their teachers I think is very critical. And it tended to keep people, in the organizations I worked in, stay [INAUDIBLE], I mean, stay in there and keep them going.

It's interesting the what around the ensuring accountability systems are fair and useful. I think we talked about this a couple times when we were talking about this webinar. And there's so many different variations of accountability. Are we talking about state accountability? Are we talking about local accountability? Are we talking about evaluation?

All those are different and all those play a part in the roles that we have. But I have always found that having great communication with your folks you're working with is critical. And I think in the role of a principalship or a superintendency, I think one of the keys to being successful is making sure you're communicating with people around you. And I think that's probably one of the things you work on in your program, Jim, I'd have to guess, is having really good communication skills, both not talking, but maybe listening. So I'd be curious to see what you guys are doing around that.

JIM MASTERS: Well, so we basically, the way the MLDS is set up is we look at leadership through the lens of five domains. What it means to be visionary, instructional, managerial, relational, and innovative as a leader. And what are the skills necessary to do that?

And Ken, you raise a good point of relative to evaluation. I think there are a couple of different directions that schools or state departments can pursue. You can approach it with that squinty-eyed, are they doing a good job sort of approach. Or you can question whether or not our efforts to support and develop those principals have been successful.

Do we see the learning that we are sharing with them represented in practice? Is that emerging as something that's influencing it? And one of the things that I-- in a recent survey from participants, one of the comments from one of our principals, I absolutely love it and I've shared it with people quite often. They said that relative to their MLDS participation, it was a lot better than they thought it was going to be. And the longer you stay in it, the better it gets.

And in my mind, is that a product of us getting better, or is that a product of, here is a principal who is gaining experience, and now what we gave them is more applicable, it makes more sense, they see more connections to their work. And then consequently, they're pursuing more information on their own. Whatever the case may be, we'll take it, because that is our aim and our intent.

KEN HAPTONSTALL: One thing I'd just throw in there, superintendent evaluations are kind of interesting. We're talking about superintendents coming, going, leaving, staying. In Colorado, there's no state requirement for the evaluation. It's up to the school board.

And they're fairly willy nilly, I would say, in most parts, because some school boards will essentially give you an evaluation of whether or not you hired the right coach or not, which I think is probably nationwide. I don't think we're the only ones who do that. But it was interesting, because the other day one of our neighboring districts, the superintendent emailed me and asked me if I had some examples of evaluations, because her board was going to evaluate her the next Monday-- this past Monday. And I said, so you don't know what's on your evaluation, you've never planned for your evaluation, and your board doesn't know what they're evaluating you on.

And she said, well, that's true. And I said, then you need to have a serious conversation with the board president about holding off and getting a tool. And I'm making that point to kind of the ensuring accountability and systems are fair and useful. If the superintendent has no idea what they're going to be evaluated on, any given year with a change of a board, you can be evaluated out, or just be evaluated on something you had no control over. So I think that's one of the tools that if you really want to retain leadership at the district level, you should have at least a system where people know what the evaluation is going to be based on.

JOHN LOPEZ: I'd like to jump in here a bit and try to bring a couple of things together. So your comment-- I mean, this question has been about retaining. The next conversation on the next slide is about, how can we better prepare school and district leaders?

So obviously, retainings, they're already there. Prepare them is how to get there. And I'd like to share some thoughts from the Q&A here. One question is, how can we better retain school and district leaders that we want to retain? But I see that in some ways, somewhat associated with the following question from a different participant, which was-- it was more of an observation than a question. It was we need to better identify those with leadership potential, and then provide the learning opportunities. And then support them once they're there.

So that's a lot, again, a lot to unpack. And the two conversations are related, the retention one and the preparation one. But now let's try to focus a little bit more on the preparing part. And

Jim, I know that that is very much intertwined with what you do. But if we can dissect those two conversations a little bit, retaining and then preparing, and shift our focus to preparing at this point.

JIM MASTERS: If I could, the piece that I hadn't mentioned already in the development of the MLDS, higher education was also at the table. And if you look at the way that the system is structured, we have four levels. And honestly, the lines between them have become increasingly blurry as we've learned more and worked with principals across the state.

But we start with aspiring. And that is the degree-seeking candidate. And I am happy to note that through the Missouri Professors of Education Administration, which is the state level association for all of our admin prep programs, they've actually taken several what we refer to as treatments or packets of learning from the MLDS, and they've been tailored to fit the needs and the demands of degree programs and people who are aspiring. So what, in essence, is happening is that the language of leadership, as it emerges from the MLDS, is being used before they ever step foot in a building as a building principal.

That effort has been in place now in an organized way for going on two years. And what we're beginning to see in our new principals, and this has been corroborated by our leadership development specialists, is that they have the language. They're coming in with some advanced concepts and understandings that we weren't seeing two or three years ago.

And so we like to think that by partnering across the board between higher education, between practitioner associations, whether that be elementary, middle school, or high school, or our superintendents association, and get this, the department being part of that collaboration as opposed to directing the efforts of all those folks, we find that people respond in strong ways. And we are seeing the impact in terms of the level of consideration that our new principals are bringing to the board.

And so I don't want to leave everybody with the sense that somehow we feel like we've solved the challenge. To be honest, part of the reason that MLDS was implemented, or even conceived, is because we had an administrative mentoring program, but we found that the results of that were pretty uneven across the state. If you had a colleague who took the idea of mentoring someone new into that position seriously, you were in good shape.

But it also became a compliance issue for a lot of folks. And it was basically a paper trail, submit it, and move on. We'd like to think that we've advanced beyond that, we've evened out some of that unlevel ground. And then we just work to get better at it every day by partnering with anybody who will sit still long enough for us to share what it is we are trying to accomplish, and then figure out how they can contribute.

KEN HAPTONSTALL: Yeah, and I'd maybe take it a little-- so at a building level and a district level, a couple different approaches. As a principal, one of the things that I found invigorated people into thinking about becoming leaders was really to let their leadership skills kind of rise. It was a time when PLCs were super-- that was the in thing in the world. And you had people that started asking really good questions.

And one of the things we used to do is some inquiry-based research in my school. I was a middle school principal. We had 900 kids, had a fairly decent-sized staff. But instead of being that-- because what you tend to find is people like that, you just give them more jobs to do, which really doesn't help much of anything other than tire them out.

But what I've tried to do is if they had a question is really do some research, some action research planning. And a couple things happened. One, they had to learn how to lead that process. And two, it allowed them to be able to get data to bring back to make changes in the school.

So that was kind of an early way for me to look at talent and look at people who were interested. And then I would encourage those folks to start working on degree programs or aspiring programs, like Jim's talking about. At the district level, it's been fascinating to me, because districts that I see that do a really good job with this have a plan for replacing folks.

I mean, whether it's an assistant superintendent or it's a role that leads into that, and like Jim said, a grooming process. Because I've seen districts that tend to-- they're shocked when a principal leaves. They open it up to the planet. They bring somebody in from across the country who knows nothing about the culture and environment of the district. Then they're shocked when they aren't successful in year one, two, or three.

Instead of having good planning processes. I would tell you, Cherry Creek over in Denver is the perfect example of a district. They have processes for replacing people. They have ways to train people up to get them ready for positions that they know are going to happen in the next four to five years.

And if you're a system that doesn't do that, you're taking a shot in the dark about what you're going to get. So I think, for the district level, having some planning and thought around that and providing people PD. But I think at the school level, really allowing people to flourish and take the lead on projects that can make a huge impact on student learning is a really good way to go.

JOHN LOPEZ: You know, Ken, you brought up Cherry Creek School District. And we recently talked with some of the administrators over there. And one of the things that they made abundantly clear to us was the issue of diversity.

And I think you were on that call, actually, with us. And the notion of how best to create, to prepare administrative leaders who don't have a lot of administrative peers who look like them for those leadership positions is something we heard this last week from that district. And it seems to be a theme.

And I know that all administrators are aware of that. But that is a pressing challenge and that we continue to hear across districts and states. And Jim, you alluded to this a little bit, at least to the topic, when you suggested that you ask the candidate, are you willing to be in this position? The answer was no. And that seems, potentially for some, like a difficult pill to swallow when you hear, hey, here's an opportunity.

I think, to some extent, and this is reflected in the Q&A that's going on here that I'm taking a look at, how do we best prepare them for those environments where it may be difficult to find that mentor who looks like them, or they feel this feeling of belonging and inclusion? And yes, we can have these real conversations. That's been a long term challenge. And it remains one.

And we're certainly not looking for any definitive answers. There aren't any. But I bring that up only to say that there's, in the chat on this call, there's quite a bit of conversation about that.

JIM MASTERS: John, you've raised a couple of points that I think are pretty critical. One is it's not surprising that we can identify the issues and the things we hope to accomplish. I think the flip side of that coin is, where is the intentional effort to address them? And how do you go about doing that?

You can't change, necessarily, community values and opportunities and just, is this a good place for someone to work and serve? However, I think that if schools are going to be serious about having teacher workforce, leadership workforce that truly reflects their student body, there is an intentionality that has to be part of that whole decision-making process.

The talent is out there, but bringing people in and grooming, mentoring, giving them opportunities to test the water, as Ken mentioned, and start giving them that sense of what leadership can be and how they can contribute in larger ways, that has to be done on purpose. I don't think we can just count on the applicant pool anymore to bring those people to our front door.

KEN HAPTONSTALL: Yeah, and I guess the one tale of caution I would put out there-- and Jim, you kind of addressed this a little bit with the mentoring that becomes a checkbox-- is the more compliance driven we get, I would say the less heart and soul of this job we do, it goes out the door. And people aren't looking to get into it the same way. So as district leaders and governance systems approach accountability in their systems, I think they need to take those and utilize those for what they're for.

But I think breathing a little life back into what the joy is in education is huge. And I think that's what gets people to be leaders in systems, is they look around and they say, you know what, that guy's pretty happy at what he does. And he's not beating us up all [INAUDIBLE] about the data. And he's using it to inform and move in the right direction.

But I see so much compliance-driven stuff anymore that I think it's killing the spirit of what we're trying to do. So hopefully, states can back off a little bit, or the feds, whoever is the driver of that. And we can all kind of figure out that we're still here for kids.

JOHN LOPEZ: Now, I want to just-- we have about four minutes left. So I'm going to encourage our participants to send some questions in as we wind down our time. And we'll do a little rapid fire to Jim and Ken if we can.

But Jim, I want to get back to a specific question that was for you. And the participant said, I'd like to ask this of Jim. The question is, what did you learn about new admin support and preparation that led to your impressive numbers? You touched on the 95% success rate. And I think that the participant wanted a little bit more insight.

KEN HAPTONSTALL: You know, I think it was really a happy result. It's not like we set out to accomplish, can we do 95%? What we did do was look at the things that are causing principals to leave.

The idea of not being adequately prepared, the idea of being isolated in their position, the loss of the opportunity to continue to learn, because despite the fact they now sit in the administrative chair, learning is still a fundamental component of who they are. And I think that by making sure that those pieces were an integral part of what we were offering in terms of professional learning. And then treating people as adults when they come to the table, I think that had a lot to do with the fact that people are now in a position where they feel not just qualified, but knowledgeable.

And that they have the support, and they're willing to endure years like 2020-21, and come back for more, which is an amazing testament to their commitment to school and community. But I just think that there are a number of factors we were able to weave into the fundamental structure of the MLDS that really touched on those pieces that drive people away.

JOHN LOPEZ: Thank you for that additional context. And hopefully, I presume that answers her question sufficiently.

KEN HAPTONSTALL: And if not, email me. I'll be glad to-- call me, we can talk.

JOHN LOPEZ: In the last two minutes, Ken, you touched on what I was going to ask, actually, as a potentially parting question. And that is that this webinar has been pretty high level, where there's a lot to unpack. All of you have the report in your chat. Feel free to take a look.

There are appendices that can give you additional information. But my question at this point is, what is it that you see that is a continuing challenge related to admin mobility that is around the corner, or that we have maybe not discussed on this call?

KEN HAPTONSTALL: [INAUDIBLE] and I have talked about this in the past. I think governance structures in school boards play a huge part in the longevity of a superintendent. And when you have elections every two to four years, depending on your system, five to seven to 11 board members, depending on your system, there's so many variables in that part of how a district operates, because every change in a school board can change leadership, can change the focus and the priorities of your system. So I think there needs to be more research done on how you effectively approach the governance structure of a school district, in terms of mobility and that, but also just on district success. So I think that's a big component.

JOHN LOPEZ: Jim, I hate to do it to you, but I think you have about 30 seconds before I have to get to the last couple slides.

JIM MASTERS: You, I find myself-- Ken's comment about the governance continuity, there's that going joke that you're hired by one board to be fired by the next. And yet, when you find superintendents who have been in place for extended periods of time, what you find, almost without exception, is strong board support and good stability there. And so the degree to which that plays into leadership longevity, whether it be from board to superintendent or superintendent to principal, principal to teacher, I think that the relationships that exist there are worthy of more exploration.

JOHN LOPEZ: Perfect, thank you. So I mentioned the report earlier. You have it in the chat. Here is the reference. So please feel free to take a look at the report.

And as I mentioned, there are additional appendices to give you insights into the methodology and things of that nature. And with that, we'll go to the last slide. And I would like to draw your attention to how to contact us, because the Q&A was great. My apologies for not getting to all of it.



First, thank you to Jim and Ken. We really appreciate you joining us today, sharing your insights and knowledge and experiences. Everyone, feel free to contact us at REL Central. You see our contact information at the bottom. Thank you again, have a good day.