

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN CAPITAL - NEW LEADERS FOR NEW SCHOOLS -

The goal of SMHC is to dramatically improve student achievement in large, urban public school districts by restructuring their human capital management systems. SMHC reforms aim to recruit top teacher, principal and central office talent and to performance-manage those individuals to improve the effectiveness of instruction in all classrooms. As part of this effort, SMHC is conducting case studies of effective SMHC practices in leading-edge districts and organizations. The case studies focus on the three major elements of all human capital management practices: talent acquisition, talent development and motivation and talent retention, as discussed in the foundational paper defining SMHC by Odden and Kelly (2008).

SMHC case studies have been completed in the following districts:

1. Boston
2. Chicago
3. Fairfax County
4. Long Beach
5. Minneapolis (local district Q Comp program)
6. Minnesota
7. New York City

SHMC case studies have been completed for the following organizations:

8. Teach For America
9. The New Teacher Project
10. New Leaders for New Schools

This paper is available in the Resources section of <http://www.smhc-cpre.org>.

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STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN CAPITAL: NEW LEADERS FOR NEW SCHOOLS¹

Anabel Aportela and Michael Goetz

New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS) is a non-university based organization that develops and builds the capacity of aspiring principals and other education leaders in strategies to dramatically boost student achievement, especially student performance in schools located in high poverty, urban districts. New Leaders was first conceived by a team of five graduate students in business and education at Harvard University. Throughout the planning and design phase, the team drew upon their interviews with school leaders and district superintendents, their own experiences as classroom teachers and leaders, and current thinking in education and policy making. The result is the NLNS aspiring principal development model, which trains aspiring school leaders in instructional, transformational, and organizational leadership through a combination of coursework and practical application.

Since its inception, NLNS has held itself accountable for significant improvements in student achievement in schools led by New Leaders principals. In service of these student achievement goals, NLNS has recently developed a program of school supports for schools led by New Leaders principals. These supports include coaching and development for the school's leadership team, peer groups led by New Leaders principals that have demonstrated significant gains in student achievement, and an online community of effective school practices. While this additional "school transformation" work continues to develop, the focus of this case is specifically on the NLNS aspiring principal model.

¹ The case is based on a review of documents (including the website <http://www.nlms.org>) and interviews with key organizational leaders.

NLNS has grown rapidly along two key dimensions since it was founded in 2000 - the number of individuals trained and the number of district partners. The organization began to train a cohort of 13 New Leaders in New York City and Chicago in 2001. By 2007, the organization had placed 437 New Leaders in nine cities and regions and expects to have a total of 700 New Leaders by 2009.

1. PHILOSOPHY AND THEORY OF ACTION

NLNS has focused on training and placing into schools transformational and instructionally focused principals on the theory that every high achieving school needs, at a minimum, a great principal. The leadership of NLNS believes that the school leadership position is an indispensable element of a successful school, although it recognizes that a great principal does not in and of itself produce great student performance. However, a great principal is vital for the transformation of a school. Thus, the organization began researching the key characteristics of highly successful schools and their principals. Through this research, it developed an understanding of the personal characteristics of great leaders (e.g. principals believe that independent of socio-economic status every student deserves an excellent education; that all children can learn to high standards; that adults are responsible for student learning; that great leaders have the capacity to lead adults and possess strong, inter-personal skills). As a result of this research, NLNS developed a set of standards and rubrics for these characteristics and began recruiting into their program people who exhibited these traits.

NLNS's theory of action is that in order to place the highest caliber principals in urban schools and increase student academic achievement, districts must redesign their strategies for finding and supporting such leaders. This redesign includes principal recruitment, selection, placement, training, evaluation, career progression and compensation. NLNS works with districts

to recruit, train and place new principal leaders in urban schools and, in the process, increase the human resources capacity of schools and the districts in which they are located. Consistent with its philosophy, NLNS makes a point of being accountable as an organization for the student achievement in the schools where New Leader principals have been placed and not just for the recruitment, development and placement of those principals.

2. ORGANIZATION

New Leaders for New Schools typically works with large, urban districts, serving a mix of start-up schools and existing schools as well as charter schools. Currently, the organization is working with nine districts that are making concerted efforts to raise the talent level of their school principals: Baltimore, Chicago, Memphis, Milwaukee, New Orleans, New York City, Oakland, Prince George County, and Washington, D.C.

Even with funding from the Gates, Broad, and Dell Foundations (with recent funding approved from the Carnegie Corporation of New York) the organization does not have a budget as large as Teach For America (TFA), primarily because of its smaller scale and the higher cost of training New Leader principals. However, it has grown quickly from an \$8 million organization in 2000 to a \$30 million operation in 2008. Fundraising is a challenge, and the organization launched an aggressive fundraising campaign in early 2008. NLNS is also assessing the possibilities of having districts defray all or a portion of the costs of developing a New Leader principal, such as ongoing professional development, support and coaching costs. For example, Baltimore, Washington, DC and Prince George's County are already offsetting some program expenses and NLNS would like to have all other districts with which they partner also cover a significant portion of the total developmental costs.

Over the first six years, 93 percent of New Leaders have held school leadership positions, including 71 percent as principals and 22 percent as assistant principals. During the 2007-08 school year, approximately one-third of New Leaders principals were in elementary schools, while 16 percent were in middle schools and just over 20 percent lead high schools. Another 20 percent of New Leader principals currently lead K-8 schools.

3. WHAT NEW LEADERS FOR NEW SCHOOLS DOES

New Leaders for New Schools recruits, selects, develops, and supports a new generation of urban school principals whose laser-like focus is on dramatic student learning gains in urban public schools.

Recruitment

NLNS aggressively recruits quite broadly; probably more widely than any college or university that has a principal training program. To identify candidates that might meet NLNS's profile of a New Leader principal, the organization works with sister organizations, like TFA and The New Teacher Project (TNTP) to identify potential candidates. It also reaches out to universities, recruits in districts in which it is already placing principals, promotes principal career opportunities on its web site, and attends educational conferences and other events, thus casting a wide net for identifying possible new principal recruits each year. One major source of candidates comes from their own New Leaders Principals (NLP) who recommend new candidates. Further, NLNS staff are always on the look-out for possible new candidates, including candidates who have strong business or civic backgrounds. In 2007, the organization trained a total of 100 New Leaders principal recruits. Given the huge need for strong principals in urban schools, especially schools in high poverty areas, the organization wants to continue to grow. In 2008, the organization will train over 140 principal recruits. As a result, the

organization has intensified its recruitment strategy, making, for example, a conscious outreach effort to current New Leader Principals to nominate individuals they feel would be a good match for the program. NLNS is trying to build a more robust pipeline of people who have the skills and characteristics needed to go into the program, including a Leading Educators program, piloted in 2008 in New Orleans, which builds the capacity of teacher leaders to become principals. The organization hopes to offer positions to more than the ten percent of applicants it currently does (see description in the Selection section of this paper).

NLNS aggressively recruits locally in the communities where it has partnered with districts: staff talk with strong principals to identify teacher leaders and reach out to local university personnel asking for recommendations for people from their masters degree programs. Furthermore, NLNS is beginning to make their overall recruitment strategies a national effort. For example, it has promised the district of New Orleans that it will bring people to the district from places outside of New Orleans and Louisiana. However, the organization is only beginning to create a national recruitment strategy, and it is not yet as advanced as parallel national recruitment efforts such as that of Teach For America.

Selection

The initial step to becoming a New Leader Principal is an online application, which is fairly extensive and intensive. Along with the customary background information, applicants are asked to share their reasons for wanting to join NLNS, how long they have thought about this decision, and how they found out about NLNS. They are also asked to compose a series of 350-700 word essays that explain the applicant's educational vision and how they intend to carry it out, their instructional approach and how they measure student achievement, their experience

leading others to a common goal, and relating an experience of professional failure and lessons learned from it.²

NLNS staff review applications using a set of criteria the organization has developed; further, these criteria are reviewed and continually adjusted. NLNS's annual adjustments of the criteria are informed by the characteristics and strategies they see working well in the field; the organization analyzes New Leader Principals who are having success in their schools at improving student achievement and look for similar characteristics in their candidates.

For those who pass the initial application screening, the next phase includes an interview with 2-3 NLNS staff members who again seek to identify candidates who reflect a match with the NLNS criteria. The next step is an all day interview; about 25 percent of all applicants move to this more intensive interview. In this intensive interview, called the "Finalist Selection Day," interviewees are asked to participate in activities and are observed by a larger group of evaluators. Candidates are asked to read a case study of a challenging school and describe an action plan. They watch teaching episodes and give critiques of the instruction that they see; this is followed by a role play with the "teacher" where the interviewee demonstrates how he or she would provide feedback to the teacher to help improve their instructional practice. NLNS encourages leaders to think strategically about this feedback; for example, what are the two things the teacher needs to work on and what are the strategies the candidate would use to promote teacher improvement?

NLNS believes that there are some knowledge and skills that can be learned (e.g., problem-solving and project management), but that there other characteristics that "you just have to bring to the table." NLNS looks for candidates who exhibit these qualities:

² A sample application can be viewed at http://www.nlms.org/NLWeb/resources/2008_Sample_Application_FINAL.pdf

- A belief that all students can learn, including students from poverty and other challenging backgrounds
- A sense of urgency about the need to improve student achievement
- A sense of personal responsibility for this work
- An orientation to be data driven
- Possession of strong inter-personal relationship skills (added in 2008), which NLNS defines as the ability to build teams, and listen and communicate effectively with others
- An orientation to be introspective, reflective and self aware.

After the above three steps in the screening process are completed successfully, NLNS offers positions in the program to only about 7 to 10 percent of applicants. This high selectivity rate is not a goal; it simply represents the number of individuals who meet the NLNS criteria. The annual target for selecting, developing and placing new principals is now 130-150 which has pushed the organization to have conversations and strategy sessions about how to bring NLNS to scale. NLNS is working to make their recruitment more strategic and efficient by increasing the percent accepted, which they believe can be done not by eroding their selection criteria but by increasing the quality of the applicant pool by targeting the right people. For example, successful TFA teachers have not been a large source for NLNS principal candidates, but in the future probably will be. NLNS continues to look for other ways to target effective teachers for recruitment into its principal program.

Training and Program Content

Once accepted into the program, candidates begin their foundational year with NLNS. This year begins with a 5 week summer training at university, where the entire community of residents focuses on the Urban Excellence Framework, a summary of the school practices and

principal actions which NLNS has seen lead to dramatic gains in student achievement in urban public schools. NLNS developed the Urban Excellence Framework by updating its initial research on effective schools and principals, looking in particular at New Leaders-led schools that were making dramatic gains in student achievement and comparing with those only making incremental gains. The Urban Excellence Framework organizes these school practices and principal actions into five major categories: Student Achievement Based Learning and Teaching, Achievement and Belief Based School Culture, High Quality Staff Aligned to Vision, Systems and Operations that Drive Learning and Culture, and Personal Leadership. All aspects of the foundational year are aligned to the practices identified in these categories.

The content is taught by experts in the field, including successful New Leaders from the field, and facilitated by NLNS staff. A significant amount of time is spent on issues such as urban education, how data on student performance should drive instructional programs, and how to assess the impact and efficacy of educational programs. The overall training approach emphasizes problem-based projects. Recently, NLNS began using a case study approach that simulates a K-8 elementary school and a high school. This program allows participants to learn about various approaches and practice that work by simulating a school experience. They work with actual school data and see videotapes of the school, are introduced to a virtual staff, etc. The goal is that they learn how to begin to determine the needs of a struggling school by learning a process and structure for analysis of a school's data, its existing programs, and the academic performance of its students. The virtual case study is a response to feedback from participants suggesting that prior training was too theoretical, a criticism that NLNS suggests is also valid for many university programs.

After the summer training program, candidates are placed in a school for a residency period lasting a full school year. During this time period, the trainees, now NLNS Residents, participate in four 1 week seminars that build on what they learned during the summer related to the categories of the Urban Excellence Framework: learning and teaching, building a culture of high expectations, aligning people, management and operations, and personal leadership. These take place in different cities across the country. The ongoing seminars cover:

- A continuation of summer seminars with a focus on data-driven decision making and instruction
- Literacy—leading for literacy and math improvement
- Aligning people—learning how to hire the right people, develop their skills, monitor and evaluate their quality and effectiveness, and conduct observations (NLNS has a contract with Research for Better Teaching [RBT] in which the RBT consultants visit the NLNS Resident’s school and complete an observation. The Resident reflects, with the help of the consultant, on what they have learned)
- Beliefs about and leading urban schools—strong culture of high expectations, analysis of race and culture
- Building a strong student culture, including classroom management and appropriate behavior
- Other topics not covered in the summer trainings, such as those surrounding union contracts and local context (e.g., working with school councils in Chicago) or other district requirements.

Throughout this residency year, NLNS evaluates individuals by using a set of leadership competencies codified under their Standards for Urban Excellence. At the midyear point,

Residents perform specific activities designed to measure the competencies. If they are on target, they receive feedback and continue their work. If they are not meeting targets, they are placed on a development plan with the expectation that they meet goals by the end of year in order to be recommended for placement as a principal. As of March 2008, the organization had dismissed four Residents and had 6-8 others on development plans for that cohort class. The mentor principal, NLNS coach, and NLNS local executive director all have input in the evaluation.

Placement of Residents

The goal of the residency year is for the Resident to perform in a way that meets the Standards for Urban Excellence—the set of critical skills for principals as determined by NLNS. In this effort, the Resident is joined by the NLNS local executive director, or chief administrator at the local/district level; the NLNS coaches who serve as instructional mentors, reinforcing the skills learned during the summer and teaching new skills throughout the year; and the Mentor Principal, an experienced principal in an urban school (where the Resident completes their residency) who shares the NLNS philosophy and is willing to take on the role of mentor to the Resident for 1 year.

NLNS executive directors in each city work closely with district staff to place Residents in urban schools; this collaborative approach to placement is part of the NLNS contract with each district. NLNS considers the location of the school and the characteristics of the individuals in making decisions about where to place Residents. At one time, NLNS concerned itself primarily with placements; now the focus is on the match of the school to the Resident, which enhances the quality and likely impact of the placements.

Residents are placed in a school with a Mentor Principal who has been successful in an urban school and who shares the NLNS view of leadership. Residents bring with them a

Principal Leadership Development Plan, which provides the road map by which the Resident will learn and develop the leadership competencies set out by NLNS. The Resident becomes part of the school's leadership team and the Mentor Principal provides guidance to the Resident, placing a strong focus on the Development Plan. For example, the Development Plan might call for the Resident to be responsible for a group of students and teachers (e.g. fourth and fifth grades or the Social Studies department in secondary schools) and that becomes the focus for principal mentoring. Residents also meet regularly with a NLNS coach for one-to-one guidance, in addition to participating in the weeklong seminars scheduled throughout the year. Residents also meet once a week with a cohort of other Residents for ongoing professional development that is broader in focus. The professional development may include visits to other schools for observations.

The NLNS coaches are an important part of the residency year. They are oftentimes a retired principal, who usually has five years or more of success in producing gains in student achievement in an urban school. The coaching ratio used to be 1 coach for every 8 NLNS residents, but the organization has increased that ratio to 1:10, in part because it has concluded that is a more appropriate coaching load and it would help maintain program costs especially as residency numbers have increased.

Residents are highly encouraged to be reflective in their practice. Residents are asked to keep a journal that is submitted monthly to their coach. This journal helps Residents understand and process what they learn, observe, or experience, as well as to reflect on the significant decisions they make and experiences during their residency. The journals can include anything from insights into their personal leadership style to the difficulties they experience balancing school leadership responsibilities with technical ones.

In addition, during this same year, Residents also complete three, year-long projects that are based on their own development plan, as well as the goals of the residency school. Two projects focus on working with a team of teachers to improve instruction in ways that lead to increased student achievement. A third project focuses on designing a comprehensive school plan based on the Resident's vision of a high performing school. In addition, each Resident compiles a portfolio of evidence that documents their fulfillment of the Standards for Urban Excellences and serves as a ready resource for future principal positions.

Formal evaluations of Residents take place twice per year and include a review of their projects and portfolios. In January and May, NLNS staff members review and discuss with Residents where they are in terms of meeting the NLNS expectations and share this evaluation with the district. Those who are doing well and are ready for principal positions are hired by the districts. Others take longer and are prepared for an assistant principal position. The goal of NLNS is to see 100 percent of Residents placed in either a principal or assistant principal position, although the organization sets annual targets around 95 percent for placing Residents in these school leadership positions.

In some cities, NLNS has been given the authority by the state to provide administrator certification for principals (e.g. Maryland, Louisiana, and Wisconsin). In Wisconsin, the ability to provide the actual certification is limited to principals working in Milwaukee. In other cities they work with a college that has approved the NLNS trainings (e.g. in New York, it works with Pace University or Baruch College; in Chicago, it works with National Louis University).

Placement of Principals

Beginning in January, NLNS starts to help Residents find jobs as principals (or assistant principals) in school districts. NLNS works closely with school districts, but Residents must go

through the regular district hiring process as NLNS itself does not place principals in schools. NLNS has found that it needs a close relationship with the districts to make the best possible match. As an example, in Chicago, local community school councils (which are similar to school boards) have the legal authority to hire principals; even the central office cannot place principals in schools. This local circumstance is a challenge because of school council turnover, but NLNS has developed relationships with these councils and a certain amount of NLNS brand awareness has helped. The Chicago district itself, moreover, approves a list of principal candidates that would include NLNS trained principals from which local school councils must select as the principal of their school.

In New York City, NLNS has less brand awareness as it is one of several organizations the city chose to train principals. When Mayor Michael Bloomberg took over New York City schools and selected Joel Klein as the Chancellor, one of their first decisions was to identify principal training models. They selected NLNS as one of the models to use, but also developed the New York City Leadership Academy with which NLNS now competes. The Leadership Academy recruits, trains, and supports aspiring principals during a 14-month program that focuses on developing the leadership skills necessary to lead challenging urban schools and improve student achievement. Its curriculum and residency program is similar to that of NLNS and the Chancellor sits on its board. The Leadership Academy places approximately 80 principals a year in New York City schools compared to NLNS that only places about 15-20 principals a year giving the Leadership Academy greater visibility within the district. Due to the increasing number of new and charter schools, NLNS has focused on training principals for these particular school contexts in New York City. While competitors in some ways, New Leaders

and the Leadership Academy organizations do have a good relationship and recently jointly applied with the District for a federal grant.

Once placed, New Leader Principals receive intensive coaching support for one year. This year of support for first-year principals continues the development trajectory of the principal, ensuring that they build the skills necessary to take the actions identified as leading to significant achievement gains in the Urban Excellence Framework. In addition to the first year support for all principals, NLNS is currently implementing supports for New Leader Principals (NLP) in their second year and beyond (e.g., opportunities for professional development and online resources, and some intensive coaching support for a subset of these principals). NLNS also encourages the NLPs to look to the community of other New Leader Principals for additional resources and support. The organization is making efforts to find new and improved ways to provide and facilitate various efforts to support NLPs. In one example, after the shooting death of a student in a first-year principal's school, the mentor principal and NLNS coach were on site that day to provide general support and specific guidance (e.g., administrative requirements, protocols, etc.).

NLNS is also now able to place some Residents with New Leader Principals as Mentor Principals and in some cases schools have a New Leader Principal, New Leader Assistant Principal and New Leader Resident in the same school. The district with the largest NLNS presence is Chicago with about 100 New Leader Principals. A partnership led to the district asking NLNS to increase the number of principals prepared annually from 20-25 to 40.

In sum, the training and support for New Leader Principals is extensive and goes beyond what any college or university does. It includes a full year of residency and, at least, one year (and for some two years) of formal coaching support once placed as a NLP. A broader form of

support continues beyond those two years, as the NLPs become part of the larger community of New Leader Principals.

Compensation

During training, Residents are compensated at an assistant principal rate of \$70-80,000 in salary and benefits. NLNS has an agreement with districts under which the district pays the Resident's compensation, and the Residents are full district employees during their Residency year. NLNS estimates the costs to recruit, select, train, and coach a principal to be about \$120,000 per person. Once hired as principals or assistant principals after their residency year, the individuals continue to be full district employees and are paid according to the district's salary schedule for these school leadership positions.

4. RESULTS

NLNS has three outcome goals:

1. School Performance at Scale

By 2014, 80 percent (over 300) of schools led by New Leaders Principals for at least 5 years will have 90-100 percent of students achieve proficiency in core academic subjects and be on track to graduate from high school ready for college, careers, and citizenship.[Note that this is a student performance goal.]

2. Mission-Driven, High-Quality Principals to Support Citywide Success for All Students

By 2014, over 50 percent of schools in most current partner cities, and over 50 percent of principal vacancies, will be filled by high-quality New Leaders Principals – individuals who have been selected and trained by NLNS with the knowledge, skills, beliefs, and frameworks needed to ensure 90-100 percent student success rates in their schools. At current scale, and with

the planned growth, this would lead, by 2014, to NLNS training 20-25 percent of the principals in the United States needed for urban, low-income schools.

3. World-Class, Scalable, Sustainable Organization and Innovative "Action Tank"

By 2014, NLNS will be a world-class, scalable, sustainable, data-driven organization that has created an essential knowledge base that is actively used by education policy and decision makers to drive educational excellence at scale. This innovative "action tank" will blend the power of a think tank with the lessons learned and the results of the highly successful schools and principals at increasing scale.

In order to measure its performance against these three goals, NLNS has developed a set of "metrics" that are used and constantly revised to reflect any changes NLNS deems necessary. The organization relies on both internal and external sources of information.

Goal 1 includes an "out-performance metric" and "dramatic gains metric" which include absolute and value-added measures of student achievement. NLNS wants to develop a student success metric beyond academic achievement; further, it has just revised its academic mission and goals in the last year and is developing new metrics to measure progress.

Goal 2 is a quantity metric—what is the sheer number of New Leader Principals who are placed? A key for this goal is the proportion of New Leader principals in a school system and in all the cities in which they are partnering. The organization also has "recruitment" and "placement" metrics for all cities. It uses survey and rubric data to measure retention and quality of placements.

Goal 3 is centered on strategic and operational excellence metrics. Having a strategic plan is an important tool for the organization as is their "financial sustainability metric," which

focuses on budgeting and fundraising. People management is also important as is having data upon which to base continuing improvement efforts.

NLNS looks to feedback from all participants, schools, Mentor Principals and NLNS staff to determine what is and is not working. The organization places an emphasis on student achievement results, as indicated above in Goal one. NLNS tracks the impact of all principals: which cohort they belong to, the school in which they took a position and the student performance in that school. NLNS gathers performance data initially from publicly available state test scores; the organization then sets its own goals for student performance, sometimes in collaboration with the NLPs leading the school. It is important to note, however, that NLPs are held accountable directly to the district at this point. While still part of the NLNS organization as leaders in schools, they are school district employees.

NLNS has a contract with the RAND Corporation to conduct an external evaluation of the organization. For each school where an NLP has been placed, RAND will analyze year by year student data in the major (tested) subject areas and complete a value-added analysis model.³ NLNS expects that 90-100 of their schools will meet student proficiency goals. Early findings indicate that if a NLNS principal has been in a position two years, the difference between NLNS and non-NLNS leadership shows similar results to lower class size reduction in terms of standard deviations of student performance.⁴ First year cost-benefit analysis suggest that the Tennessee STAR class size reduction was more expensive than having a NLNS principal in a school.

³ This study is in year one and RAND is expected to complete its final report in 2011.

⁴ NLNS notes that these results are about “outperforming” comparable public schools, while confirming that its overall goals are targeted to reaching high “absolute” goals for student learning.

The research questions that RAND was asked to address are:

- How does the presence of a NLNS principal affect student achievement?
 - Does student achievement improve in schools after a NLNS principal is put in place?
 - Is student achievement in NLNS schools higher than in comparable schools led by other principals?
 - Are gains in student achievement higher in NLNS schools than in comparable schools led by other principals?
 - Are there principal, school or district characteristics that are related to differences in student achievement among NLNS schools?
- Does the presence of a NLNS principal affect the school's propensity to exhibit the characteristics of a 'high quality school'? How do the actions of NLNS principals compare to the actions of principals in similar schools not affiliated with NLNS?
- What are the characteristics and actions taken by NLNS principals, and how do they relate to the principal's effectiveness in improving school and student outcomes?
- Do particular elements of the NLNS model have more or less influence over principal actions, school quality and student outcomes?
- How is the NLNS model being implemented in practice?
- How do district relationships evolve over time and how can the model be implemented at greater scale?

The organization has an ongoing Organizational Learning Plan which integrates these research questions and findings from the RAND Corporation with other internal studies and learning efforts. One such study underway is the Dramatic Gains Project which involves visiting

high performing and non-high performing schools led by NLNS principals and investigating what is and what is not working in order to update and deepen the practices identified in the Urban Excellence Framework. These improvements in the Framework then improve the substantive content of future selection criteria and trainings. The selection of schools for this study is based on student academic results.

5. LESSONS LEARNED BY NLNS LEADERSHIP

One of the biggest challenges to the success of the NLNS model of leadership development and placements is the stability, or lack of stability, of the district's leadership, (particularly the superintendent). Oftentimes, superintendents will enter into an agreement with NLNS, are committed to it, and are aligned with the NLNS mission, but then on average only stay two and a half years. The new district leader may not be committed, or as committed, to NLNS. This lack of commitment at the head of a district trickles down to other district personnel.

In order to limit the effect of turnover in district leadership, and especially as NLNS strives to bring the program to scale, it has to work closely with many people within the district. NLNS has to build a coalition of middle management in the district – Director of HR, Director of PD, for example – because they may be less likely to turn over as frequently yet are still intertwined with the work of New Leaders.

A change in district leadership is not the only potential challenge for NLNS. The organization has made a concerted effort to maintain good relationships with district unions. While NLNS is in some districts where no unions exist (e.g. New Orleans), the organization does not avoid districts because of problems (or potential problems) with unions.

A more constraining element of working within school districts is the lack of autonomy that many principals have in terms of implementing actions that will lead to improved student

learning. The degree of autonomy afforded a principal depends on the district. The prime example of these constraints are policies that impact the management of human capital, usually taking the form of collectively bargained contracts that place restrictions on the hiring and firing of staff. New Leader Principals also struggle with local policies around budgets and how they can use the budget (e.g. manage talent or implement salary differentials). This lack of management flexibility also creates a challenge when evaluating the success of the NLP and NLNS's goals—key indicators of success may be outside of the principal's control. The organization has made a point to account for this as part of the RAND study.

Adding to the challenge of limited autonomy, is the fact that many school districts do not complete budgeting until late in the year, resulting in teachers and principals not being able to adequately plan for the opening of a new school year. Sometimes principals are hired right before the school year starts or principals are not able to hire teachers until after the year starts. This process leaves no time for planning and erodes the talent the principal can hire. Additionally, the lack of good, accessible data makes it challenging to overcome these timing problems.

Often, academic concerns, like student learning, can take a back seat to solving or dealing with immediate problems (i.e. regular safety crises) and the challenge is to focus the principal and the school on student learning. One potential advantage increasingly available is that a number of NLNS "alums" have taken higher positions in administration in school districts. However, this can be a positive and a negative. By taking them out of the school, they are removed from student learning. On the other hand, if you are looking to make systemic change, it can help a district to have a community of likeminded individuals in administrative positions.

NLNS strives to select great leaders. The current strategy, however, is time intensive and NLNS wants to improve the rate of acceptance into the program and the numbers of principal placements without compromising the quality. NLNS also sees learning from the field as important and sees itself as an organization that is continuously learning and using that learning to improve.

There are potentially plenty of opportunities for districts to work with organizations like NLNS. But in order to make the most of these partnerships, districts need to have structures in place for better human capital management. NLNS finds that many districts do not track their talent or have the basic information needed to foresee turnover, etc. These things can prevent districts from tapping into natural talent and human capital opportunities. Also, some districts are better situated for making changes because they ask for help. And some do not. It depends on the district and the talent they have.

NLNS has begun “dissecting” the school level organization beyond selection, recruitment, and placement. NLNS staff are looking at the functions of scheduling, management and operations, etc. because they believe that these processes matter. One story shared by an NLNS Leader concerned her time working in a large urban district. When the district first hired new teachers, many did not get paid on time. Upon further investigation it turned out that this was and had been the norm for years. The attitude this leader encountered was one in which she was told that “you can’t pay all teachers on time.” It had never been done and so people thought it could never be done. She set a goal for her team to change this practice, hired a firm to assess the various operational procedures entailed in getting teachers on the pay schedule, and then redesigned and automated all the relevant processes . By the third year they had paid almost 100 percent of all new teachers on time and for the right salary amount, except for unique process

cases (e.g., fingerprinting holdups). The lesson here was that if a district cannot do something as basic as pay people on time, how can it get people to buy into making more sophisticated changes? If NLNS wants all district personnel to buy into the potential of NLNS, it feels it must look seriously at the transactional aspects of all HR functions within districts and make sure they operate well, as a foundation for implementing other strategic talent, curriculum and instructional strategies to boost student learning.