

Research Regarding the importance of Charter School Leadership and the use of Mentors:

- 1) For a succinct overview of the research, we recommend [“The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning,”](#) a 2013 report published by the Wallace Foundation.
- 2) Campbell, C. , & Gross, B. . (2008). [Working without a safety net how charter school leaders can best survive on the high wire](#), from National Charter School Research Project, pg. 30-31. In the findings, the research states that 55% of charter leaders identified local mentoring as supportive to their development and retention in the charter leadership field.
- 3) Mitgang, L. D., & Wallace Foundation. (2007). Getting principal mentoring right: Lessons from the field *Perspective*. New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation.
- 4) Summary of research on benefits of mentoring by Georgia Department of Technical & Adult Education, www.coe.uga.edu/chds/mentoring/benefits.htm

The following is taken from the CCSA Mentor Project Guide for Mentors:

Purpose of the CCSA Mentor Project:

“The Charter movement depends upon attaining quick success with students shortly after school launch. Yet, shortly after charters’ open, new charter leaders infrequently utilize services of support available to them **and report high levels of isolation**. Research shows that nearly 71% of charter leaders intend to leave their position within the first 5 years on the job, with fewer than 40% building adequate successors to carry the work forward¹. With the transition to rigorous state standards and assessments, it is critical that new charter leaders remain focused on their role as an instructional leader amidst the reality of the operational demands of launching a successful new charter school. The CCSA Mentor Project pairs new charter leaders with more experienced charter leaders to provide real time support in operational areas while guiding new leaders to become more strategically focused on the development of effective instructional leadership behaviors.”

The Role of the Principal as the Instructional Leader: What does research say?

Effective leaders prioritize the improvement of school culture and teaching and learning to improve student achievement. In fact, in Rand Corporation’s comprehensive review (2016) of the literature, Leithwood et al. (2004) concluded that principals are second only to teachers as the most important school-level determinant of student achievement.

Leithwood et al. (2004), also found that “principals impact teaching and classroom practices through school decisions such as formulating school goals, setting and communicating high achievement expectations, organizing classrooms for instruction, allocating necessary resources, supervising teachers’ performance, monitoring student progress and promoting a

¹ Campbell, Christine, and Betheny Gross. *Working Without a Safety Net: How Charter School Leaders Can Best Survive on the High Wire*. Seattle, Wash: National Charter School Research Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2008.

positive, orderly environment for learning.” Strong instructional leaders spend a substantially greater percentage of time on improving student achievement than less successful principals.

Operations and Finance vs. Instruction?

You may notice that there is a real focus in the ILF on **instructional leadership** – with an exclusion of operations and finance. It is understood that new charter leaders will need guidance on how to most efficiently and effectively deal with operations and finance. The work of launching a charter can become so focused on operations and management that instructional leadership falls away. In one study of 111 New Jersey Charters, revealed that a 10% increase in mean test score increased the probability of survival at year 5 by 15% and at year 10 by 41%². As such, it is essential that every meeting the mentor draws the through line between operations and management issues and their potential implications for instruction and student achievement.

Effective operations and finance in a school serve to either positively or negatively impact the foundation upon which to build the school’s overall academic outcomes. These issues are real for the leader of a new charter school and are often the reasons most cited in research for charter school closures. It is not the intention of this project to imply that effective operations and finance are not an important foundation to a well-run school. However, it is also clear that in an era of more rigorous standards and assessments, too little focus on components of the leadership role that are instructional sets schools up for subpar performance on academic outcomes and thus lead to failure by the charter’s first renewal. There are a large number of readily available trainings, workshops and resources that CCSA already provides member charter schools in the area of operations and finance. We have provided these in Appendix B for the mentor to use with the mentee as appropriate.

There will likely be a tension point during the mentor relationship – when the driving challenges the mentee wants support on are operational rather than instructional. By no means should a mentor ignore or dismiss the mentee’s concerns and requests for help. What we recommend instead is that the mentor support the operational challenge by providing guidance from their own experience or reaching out to CCSA or other mentors for support, while rooting the solution whenever possible with an instructional focus or pivoting the conversation as quickly as possible to center on instructional leadership.

Additional Reading and Resources for Charter Leaders in the Mentor Project:

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