

## TOWARD A “COHESIVE LEADERSHIP SYSTEM”

Over the last five years, as Wallace and its partners have worked to ensure that all schools have the necessary leadership to improve student performance, the complexity of that goal has become increasingly apparent. Together, we’ve come to realize that not only must training improve to better prepare leaders for the challenges they face, but states and districts also need to adopt well-coordinated policies to create the conditions and incentives for effective school leadership. Leaving behind the “leader-as-hero” model that can at best deliver only fleeting progress, we’ve pursued a far more productive path to define, test and put in place the necessary elements for enabling many more leaders to succeed.

To build on the collective progress we’ve made in understanding and implementing the *individual* ingredients of leadership improvement, the next phase in this work is to ensure that states and districts have the right ingredients in place, that they are continuously improving, and that they fit together into a cohesive, mutually reinforcing whole. Based on the progress to date in our partner sites along with the research we’ve sponsored, what emerges is the following working definition of what a high quality, sustainable “cohesive leadership system” to improve student learning looks like:

***Districts will have developed and implemented strategies, coordinated with relevant state-level policies, that are aimed at ensuring that school leaders are well-trained in the skills needed to improve instruction and manage change – and are well-supported by job conditions and incentives.***

Developing such a cohesive leadership system – in which state- and district-level policies and practices are well-aligned and mutually supportive – is what it will ultimately take to ensure that leaders have the preparation and the means to implement sustained instructional improvements that lift student achievement in schools throughout each district, and statewide. Clearly, more evidence and experience is needed to deepen our understanding both of the working definition of this system and its components. But states and districts that are working together to create such cohesive leadership systems are concentrating on the following three key components:

- **Standards:** Identifying, codifying and implementing standards of effective leadership and assessing the quality of leadership and the degree to which it is improving. At the state level, implementing these standards may involve changing certification rules for principals and other leaders and ensuring that leadership training program accreditation requirements are well-connected to the standards. At the district level, it can mean assuring that hiring and placement practices, leader evaluation procedures and incentives encourage leaders’ behaviors to reflect the standards;
- **Training:** Establishing high-quality leader training programs based on key components of effectiveness that have been identified by research and the experiences of our partner districts and states, including: job-relevant content, effective methods such as simulations and mentoring, and assessments of outcomes; and
- **Policies:** Improving the policies and the conditions necessary for leaders to lift student achievement, which could include: having and using reliable data to allocate resources (people, time and money); ensuring that roles and responsibilities clearly focus on learning; and enacting supportive governance policies.