

NEW SCHOOLS, NEW LEADERS:

A STUDY OF PRINCIPAL TURNOVER AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AT NEW HIGH SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK CITY

Meryle Weinstein
Robin Jacobowitz
Todd Ely
Kate Landon
Amy Ellen Schwartz

Institute for Education and Social Policy
Steinhardt School of Education and
Wagner School of Public Service
New York University

Education Finance Research Consortium

October 23, 2009

Background

- ❖ Our previous work examined teacher stability in new high schools
- ❖ We found that in these schools:
 - The percent of experienced teachers declined during the first five years
 - The percent of teachers at the schools for two years or more also declines during this time
- ❖ Changes in staffing may affect small high schools more intensely because of the interpersonal and interdependent relationships that exist within

Importance of the Current Research

- ❖ New schools can be particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in staffing and leadership
- ❖ Surge in the development of new schools
 - Small high schools
 - Charter schools
- ❖ Principals and strong leadership are important for the academic success of schools

What the Management Literature Tells Us

- ❖ Initial stages of an organization's development aims to create a stable, predictable environment and leadership transitions can interrupt this process (Schein, 1985; Kimberly, 1979)
- ❖ High levels of employee turnover are both the cause and effect of problematic conditions and low performance (Ingersoll, 1999)
- ❖ Organizational stability is an important component of a healthy school (Tesh, 1991; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2000, Purkey & Degen, 1985)

The Impact of Principal Transitions on Schools: What The Research Tells Us

- ❖ High principal turnover is correlated with high teacher turnover (Plecki *et al*, 2005)
- ❖ Length of principal tenure positively affects student achievement (Vanderhaar *et al*, 2006)
- ❖ Changes in leadership can reverse previous accomplishments and leave new school community distrustful (Macmillan *et al*, 2004; Hargreaves, 2005)
- ❖ Advance planning can create stability necessary for institutionalization of best practices (Glasspool, 2006)

Research Questions

- ❖ What is principal turnover like in new high schools?
- ❖ What leadership structures help these schools sustain and enhance academic gains?
- ❖ How are these structures institutionalized so as to insulate them from changes in staff and administration?

Bottom line

- ❖ New schools saw considerable principal turnover during their first ten years
- ❖ Few formal support systems were in place, leaving principals to create their own, informal networks
- ❖ While the change from founding principal to successor may have little effect on student performance, further changes can be more problematic

Sample

- ❖ All NYC public high schools that opened between September 1993 and June 2002 (N=80)
- ❖ Relative to all NYC high schools, our sample has:
 - Higher % of black, Hispanic and poor students
 - Lower % special education, ELL, or recent immigrants
 - Lower % of 9th and 10th grade students who met 8th grade ELA and Math standards
 - Teachers with less experience and education
 - **Yet, higher four-year graduation and lower four-year dropout rate**

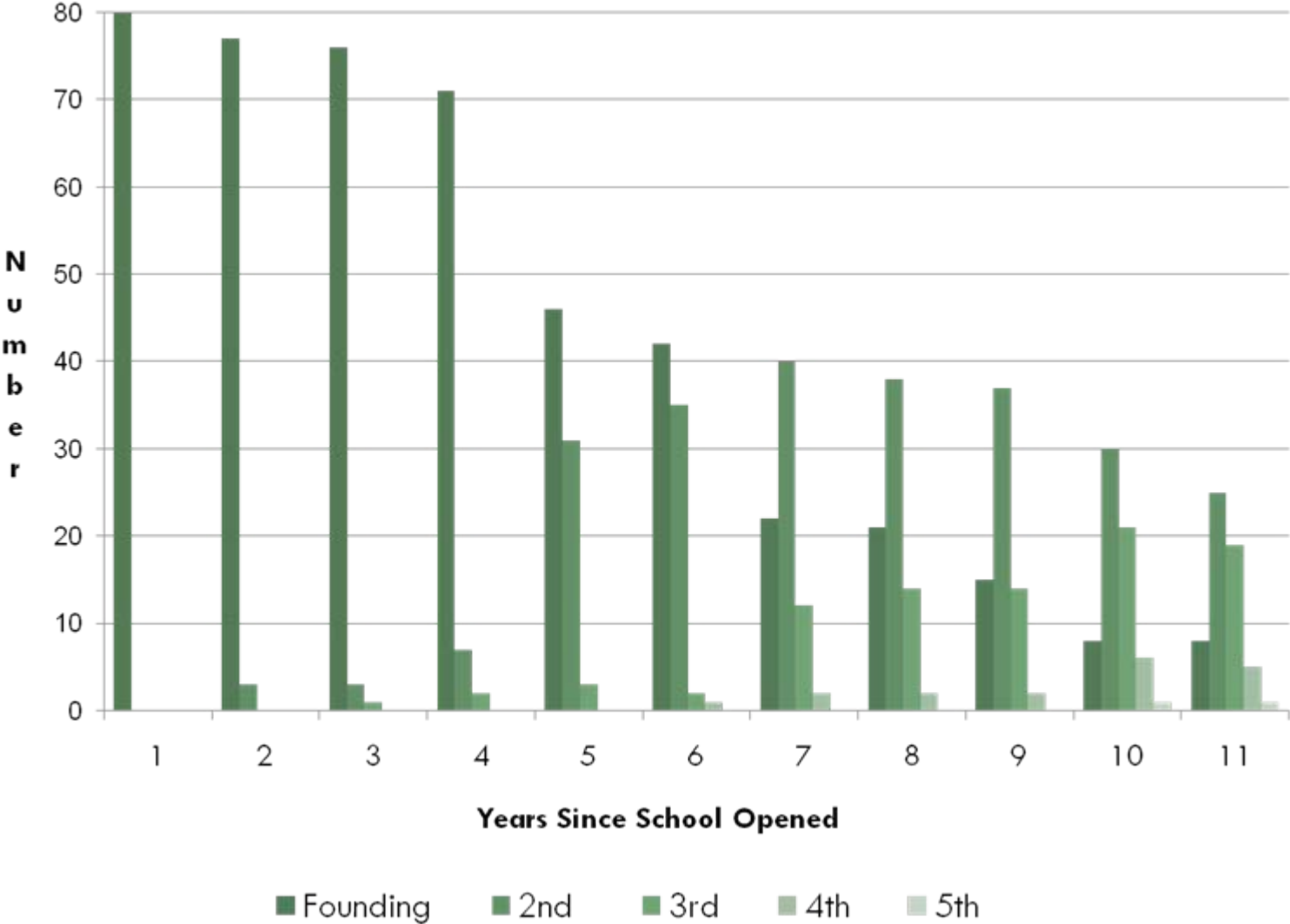
Principal Turnover

- ❖ Average principal tenure is 3.4 years
- ❖ No principal remained at a school for longer than 4.7 years
- ❖ Average tenure for founding principal is 4 years
- ❖ During the first ten years:
 - Zero transitions **16%**
 - One transition **48%**
 - Two transitions **36%**
 - Three transitions **6%**

Number of Founding Principals, New Principals and Mean Years Tenure by School Year

School Year	N Observations	N Founding Principals		N New Principals		Mean Years Tenure
		N	%	N	%	
1	80	80	100.0	0	0.0	1.0
2	80	77	96.2	3	3.8	2.0
3	80	76	95.0	4	5.0	2.9
4	80	71	88.4	9	11.3	3.7
5	80	46	57.5	34	42.5	3.4
6	80	42	52.5	38	47.5	4.1
7	76	22	28.9	54	71.0	3.3
8	75	21	28.0	54	72.0	4.2
9	68	15	22.1	53	77.9	4.7
10	66	8	12.1	58	87.8	3.6
11	58	8	13.8	50	86.2	4.7

Number of Principals in Each School by Years Since School Opened



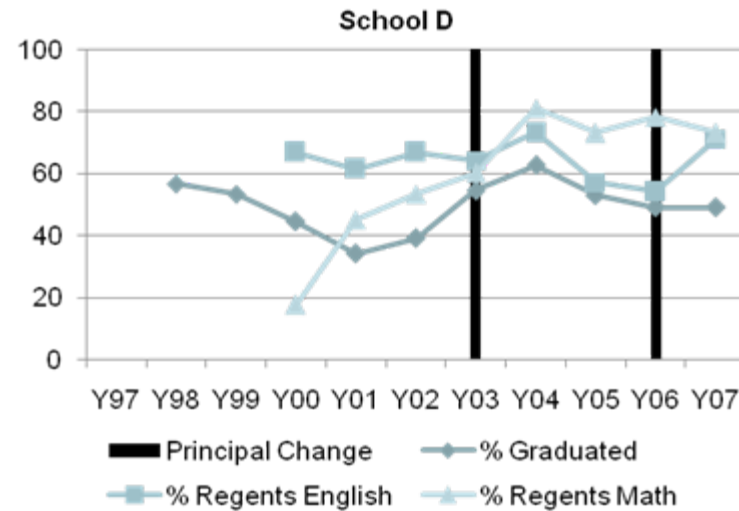
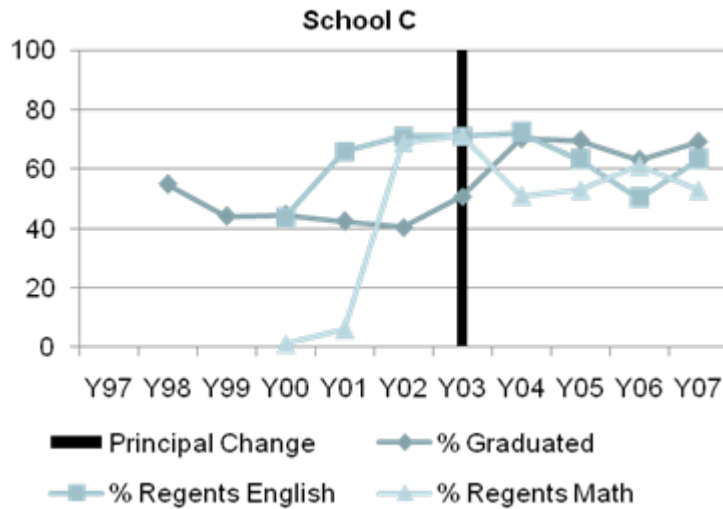
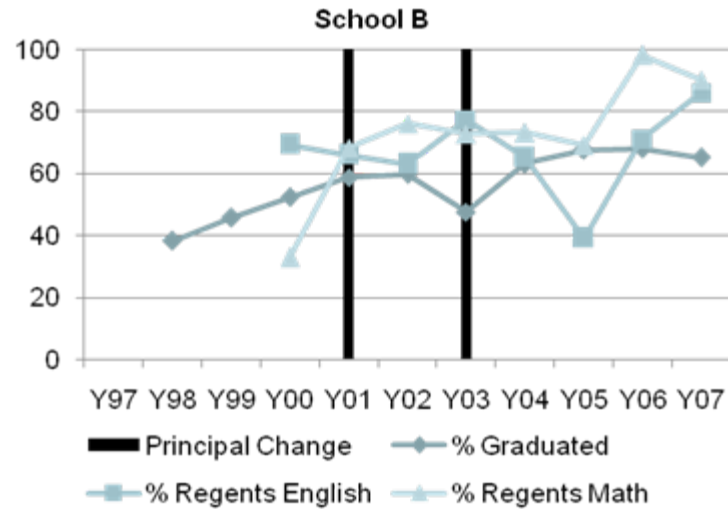
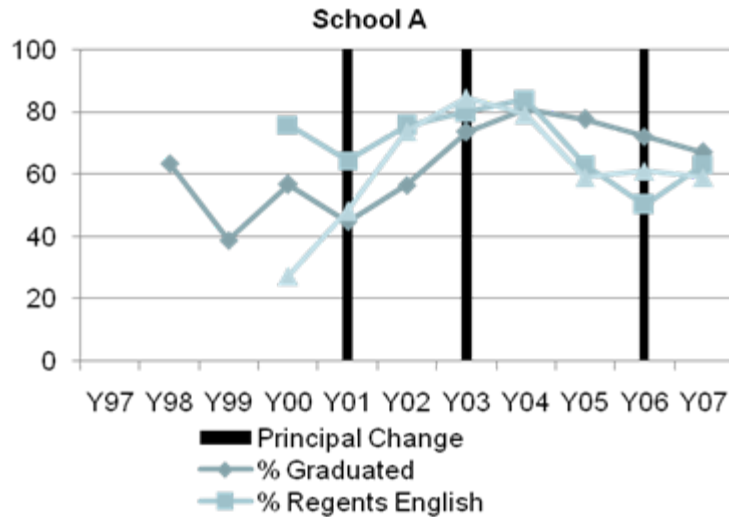
Effect on Student Outcomes

	Model 1	Model 2
Age of School	-0.03	-0.06*
	(0.80)	(0.63)
Principal Change 2nd Principal	-0.98	-0.29
	(1.82)	(1.42)
Principal Change 3rd Principal	-5.20*	-3.06*
	(2.55)	(1.87)
Constant	53.70****	47.29
	(3.13)	(6.06)
Year FE	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	Yes
School FE	No	No
R²	0.09	0.50
N	685	685

Case Studies

- ❖ Goal was to examine process of principal transition
- ❖ Using quantitative data we identified 13 schools that had been open at least 10 years and experienced principal turnover
- ❖ **Four** schools included in case study
 - One school experienced one principal transition
 - Two schools experienced two principal transitions
 - One school experienced three principal transitions

School Performance: Case Study Schools, 1997-2007



Stories of Transition

- ❖ We found very different stories of becoming principals and little institutionalization
- ❖ Only one principal had a smooth, planned transition; the other three were sudden and happened mid-year

Positives

- ❖ All had been teachers and acknowledged this as important to ability to lead school
- ❖ Determined to create systems that supported teaching and learning
- ❖ Created a cohesive staff aligned with mission and vision of school
- ❖ Created their own, informal support networks

Difficulties

- ❖ Tension between old and new roles
- ❖ Difficulty in navigating multi-faceted job description
- ❖ ***Few formal support, sustained structures in place***

Conclusions

- ❖ Similar to our previous findings on teacher stability, we found frequent principal turnover
- ❖ Initial change from founding principal to successor may have little effect, *the change from founding principal to the **third and beyond** is associated with a significant decrease in graduation rates*
- ❖ Little planning for transition
- ❖ Previous experience as a teacher helped with the transition
- ❖ New principals largely left on their own with limited support

Policy Implications

- ❖ Districts should work to decrease the rate of principal turnover within schools
- ❖ Until then, principal professional development programs may be able to support these new principals during the transition period, including:
 - Mentoring, networking, and support groups to provide moral and technical assistance
 - Shadowing other principals
- ❖ Model of distributed leadership



I N S T I T U T E F O R

Education and Social Policy

steinhardt.nyu.edu/iesp