

# **INVESTING IN PRINCIPALS AS THE LEVER FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

March 27, 2025 – NAEF Impact'ED Conference  
Amy Galloway & Jill Akin

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SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT LEADERS



# OBJECTIVES

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**1**

**Understand the  
importance of  
effective principals**

**2**

**Examine a  
foundation's role in  
providing the types of  
support principals  
want and need**



# AGENDA

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**Intro & Who's in the Room?**



**Why Invest in Principals?**



**Return on Investment  
with Effective  
Programming**



**How to Invest in Principals**



**Questions?**



# Introductions & Who's in the Room?





# AMY GALLOWAY





# JILL AKIN





# WHO'S IN THE ROOM?

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# Why Invest in Principals?





“Cultivating high quality principals requires  
**intentional** and **coordinated** effort by  
districts and partners.”

(Learning Policy Institute’s report “Developing  
Effective Principals: What Kind of Learning Matters”)



# THE FOUNDATION ROLE

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## What we can't control:

Staffing decisions are owned by district leadership, as they should be

## Why foundations should care:

Supporting capacity building of district talent is a key lever to impact student learning

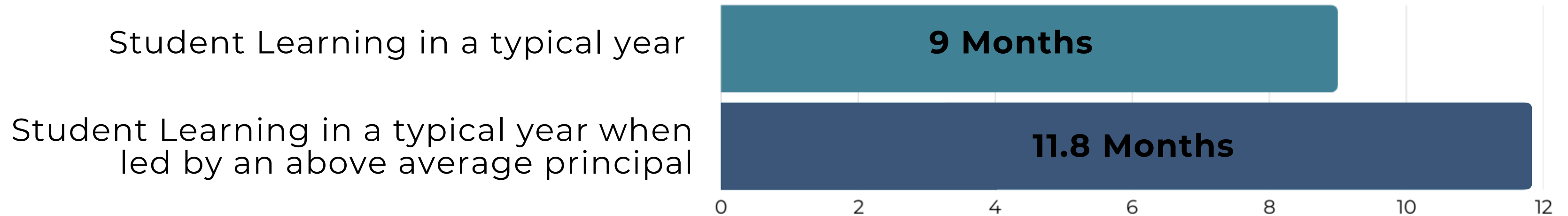
Understand the research behind the importance of student outcomes and school success





# PRINCIPALS IMPACT STUDENT LEARNING

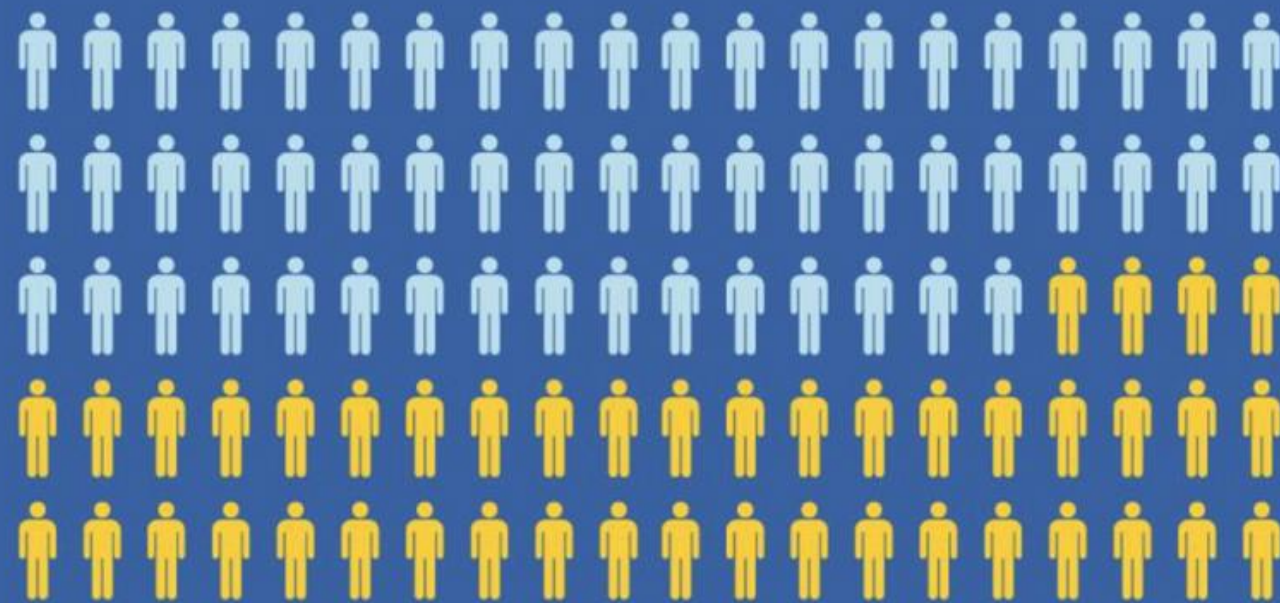
Replacing a below-average with an above-average principal results in learning that is roughly equivalent to **2.9 additional months** of learning in math and **2.7 additional months** of learning in reading in the standard 9-month school year (Grissom et al., 2021)



# PRINCIPALS IMPACT TEACHER RETENTION

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When a principal leaves a high-need school, 44% of teachers leave, too.



GROW PRINCIPALS; KEEP TEACHERS

**Teachers regularly name principal support as one of the most important factors in their decisions to stay or leave a school.**  
**(Podolsky et al., 2016)**





# BEING A PRINCIPAL IS HARD

SCHOOL & DISTRICT MANAGEMENT

## Report Summary: Do Principals Have an Impossible Job?



By [Lesli A. Maxwell](#) — January 21, 2015 ⌚ 2 min read

### Being a Principal is One of the Most Complex Jobs There Is



16th Street Consulting · [Follow](#)

Published in Age of Awareness · 3 min read · May 13, 2021



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Let me clarify, being a good principal is one of the most complex jobs there is. There are plenty of people who sit in the chair that says “principal” and

## The Principal: The Most Misunderstood Person in All of Education

### My working hours and daily duties

Most days I am school at 7:00am and leave at 7:00pm. It is not the volume so much as the complexity and the velocity of change (from Curriculum, HSC minimum standards, to staffing formulas, behaviour management, health and safety, industrial awards, disabilities, professional development, community expectations, tree audits, social media, VET skills and compliance, student wellbeing and all that comes with that, etc) and how you manage that change, so that your team feel supported in their roles.

I spend most Sundays working, so that when I’m back at school I have time to meet, influence, support and empower all my people. Educational leadership is far more complex than most leadership positions; context – and the flux of society – lands in schools. School leadership is highly complex, and no two contexts are the same. I am the face of education in my community, the only high school with in 60km. This burden is unrelenting, but also brings much joy. It is a public life, whichever way you look at it.

# WHAT PRINCIPALS NEED

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“Give principals the same kind of policy attention as teachers. Researchers, philanthropies, professional associations of school principals, and the federal department of education should seek to understand how the school leader job is changing. These individuals and organizations should also develop policies to attract and retain high-quality principals. Both state-specific and national work is needed.”

(RAND Corporation, February 2023)





# KEF'S RATIONALE FOR INVESTMENT

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**Long term  
strategy for  
district continuous  
improvement**



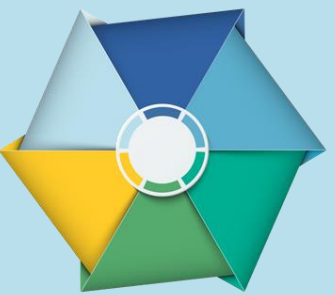
**Impact  
of funding is  
sustained year  
after year**



**Principals are a  
way to impact  
multiple teachers**

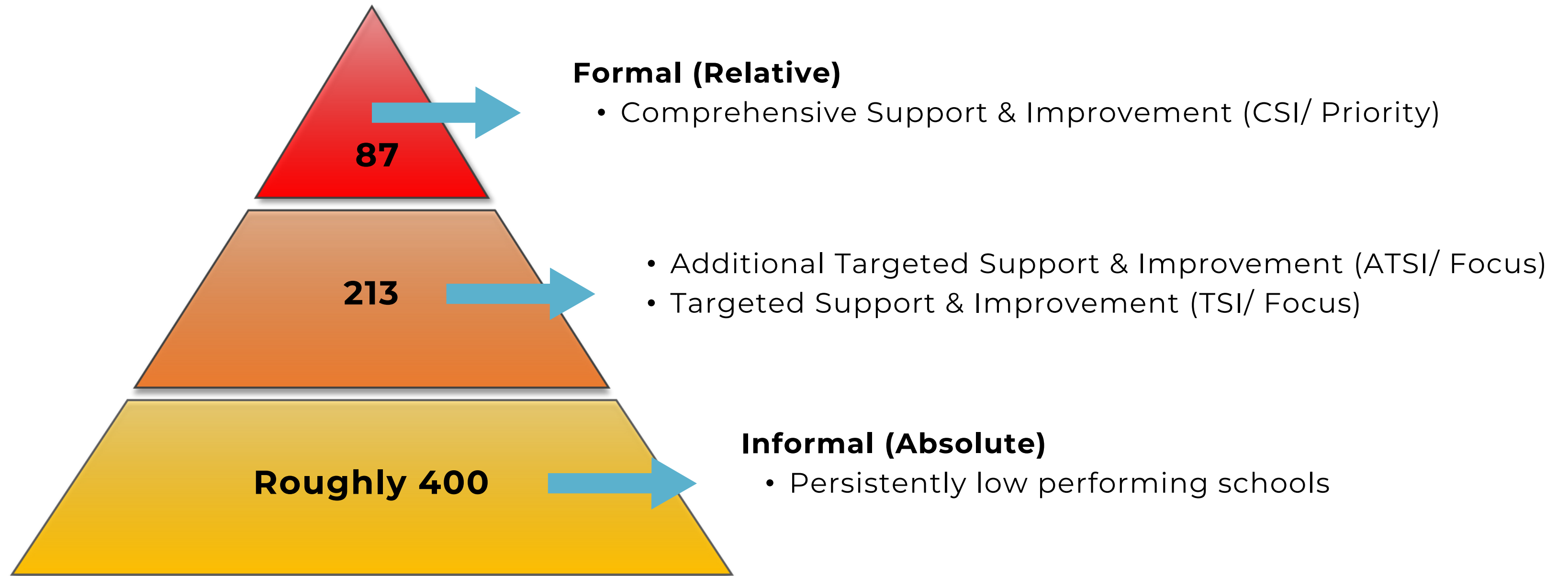


# Complex Principal Roles





# SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT DESIGNATIONS



**“There is no example  
of a turnaround  
absent high quality  
leadership.”**

Murphy and Meyers, 2008

**“There are marked  
differences in  
leadership and  
ineffective schools.”**

Sweeny, p. 384

**“We define school improvement  
leadership as an influence  
process through which leaders  
identify a direction for the  
school, motivate staff, and  
coordinate and evolving set of  
strategies toward improvements  
in teaching and learning.”**

Heck & Hallinger, 2009, P. 622

## **Reflection Questions**

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**What is the significance of  
leadership in the context of  
school improvement work?**

**How does this resonate, or  
not, with your experience?**

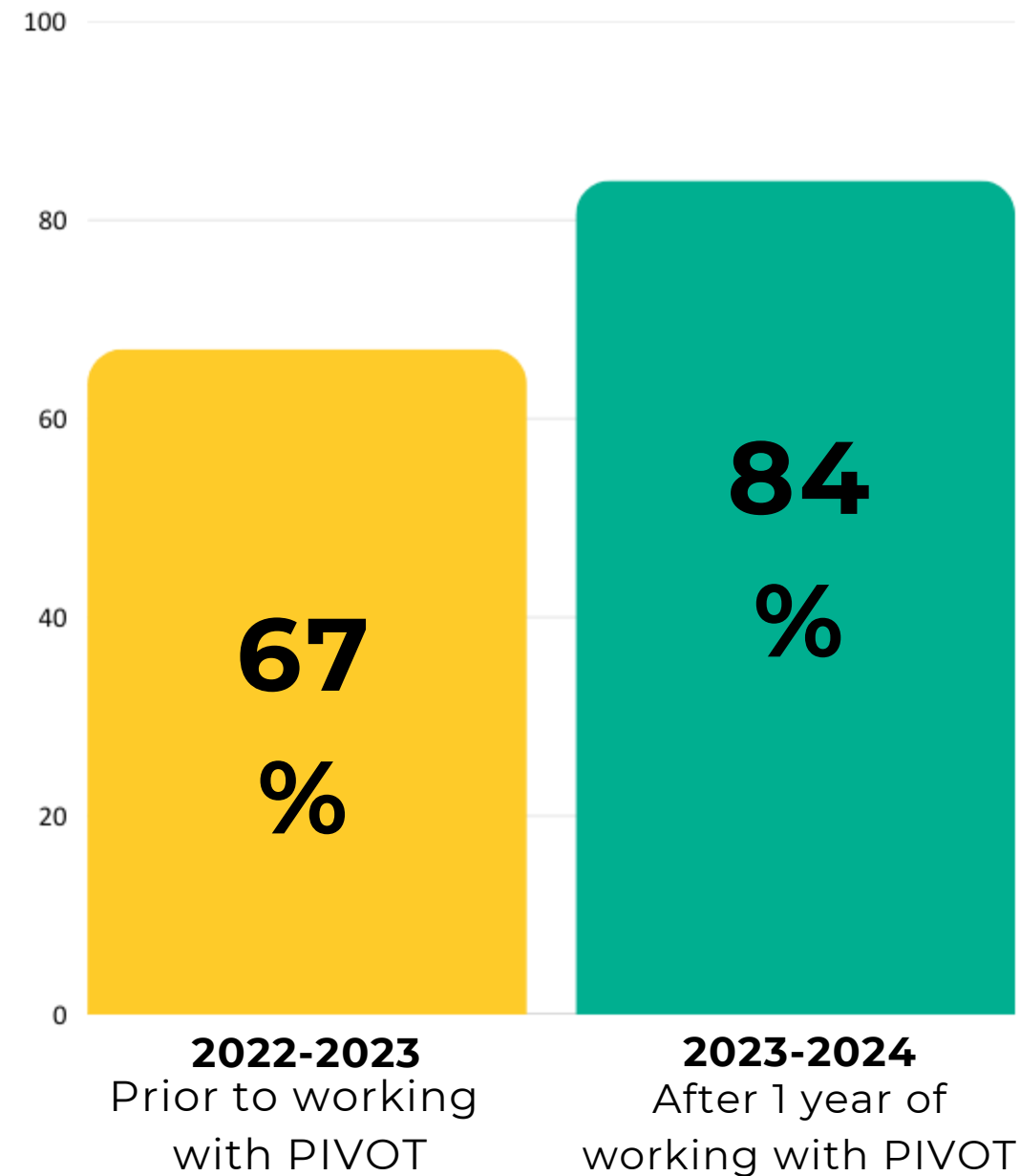
# Return on Investment with Effective Programming



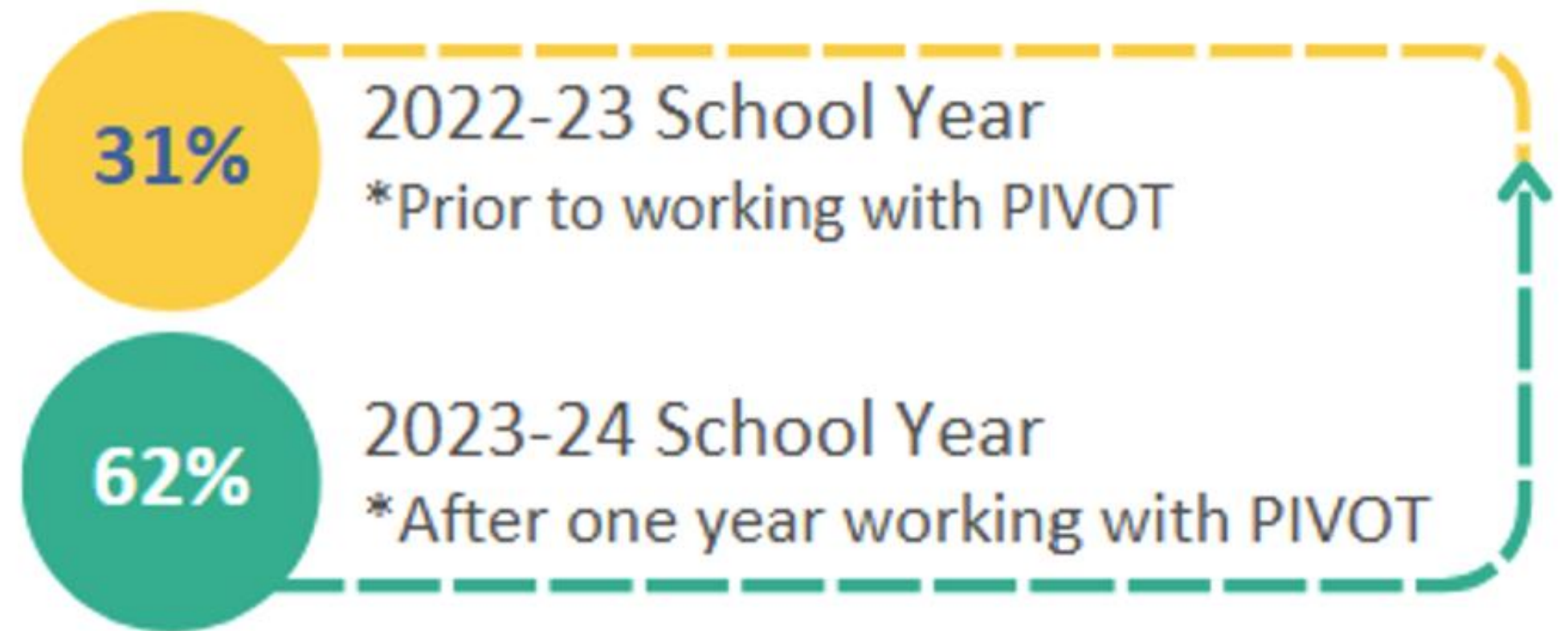


# TRACKING IMPACT

## Teacher Retention



## School Improvement Indicators



# ELEMENTARY SCHOOL EXAMPLE

✓ indicates the school met that goal

	ELA Achievement	Math Achievement	Chronic Absenteeism	Teacher Retention	Composite Growth
<b>2022-23:</b> year prior to working with PIVOT				✓	
<b>2023-24:</b> after 1 year of working with PIVOT	✓		✓	✓	✓



# HIGH SCHOOL EXAMPLE

✓ indicates the school met that goal

	ELA Achievement	Math Achievement	Chronic Absenteeism	Graduation Rate	Ready Grad Rate	Teacher Retention	Composite Growth
<b>2022-23:</b> year prior to working with PIVOT	✓		✓	✓			✓
<b>2023-24:</b> after 1 year of working with PIVOT	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



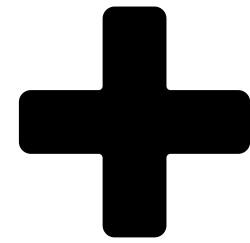


# EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMING

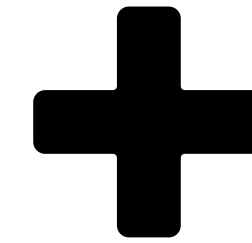
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**Leader  
Community**



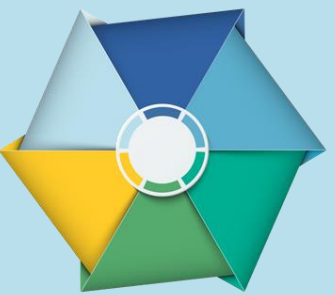
**Applied Learning  
Experiences**



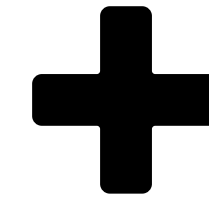
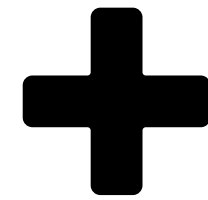
**Individualized Coaching  
& Implementation  
Support**



# How to Invest



# PARTNERSHIP TO SUSTAIN CHANGE



## Year 1

4 principals in  
the cohort



## Year 2

8 principals in the cohort

7 Assistant Principals in the cohort

District specific partnership around internal  
leadership capacity building work





# IMPACT REFLECTIONS



**Dr. Dexter Murphy**  
**Director of Region Five**  
**Knox County Schools**

“The gap in support was particularly apparent during my first year in this position (2022-2023), where even our most dedicated leaders often struggled to implement the necessary changes due to a lack of targeted and frequent guidance. The following school year, we partnered with PIVOT: School Improvement Leaders, and the impact was immediate and significant. PIVOT developed differentiated coaching support plans for each of our Executive Principals, tailored to their individual needs and the specific challenges of their schools. Their approach was hands-on, with a high frequency of in-person touchpoints that allowed for real-time coaching and feedback. This strategic alignment not only empowered our leaders to make informed decisions but also instilled in them a sense of confidence and inspiration that led to meaningful improvements in teaching and learning.”



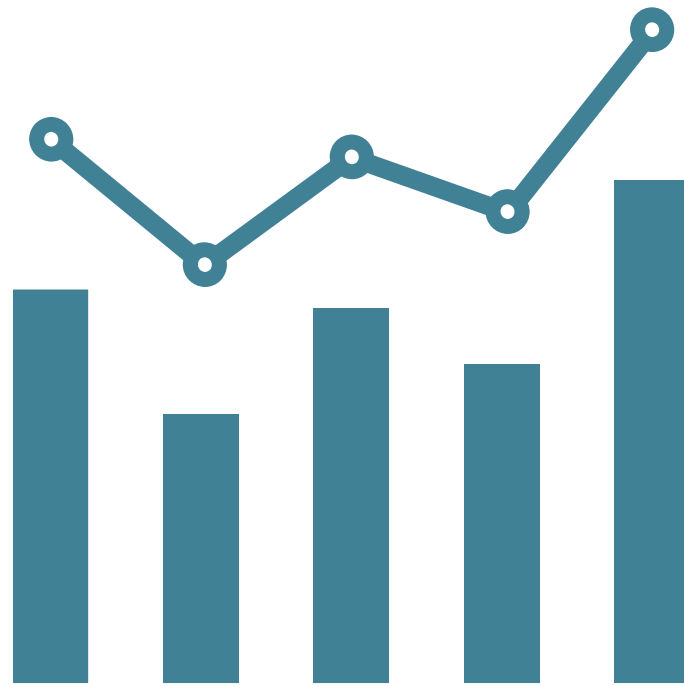
**Jessica Holman**  
**Principal**  
**Green Magnet Academy**  
**Knox County Schools**

“My growth as a leader has improved significantly since becoming part of the PIVOT cohort. PIVOT learning facilitators consistently craft meaningful, authentic, and immersive learning experiences for principals as a cohort and individually. The group and individual coaching sessions work together for a comprehensive, relevant, and timely learning experience. Another key piece of the PIVOT experience includes the school visits throughout the year, so that we can observe other turnaround efforts and connect the key, high leverage leader moves responsible for success that we learned about through our individual coaching and group learning sessions.”

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

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**Data**



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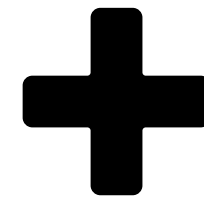
**Current  
Strategies**



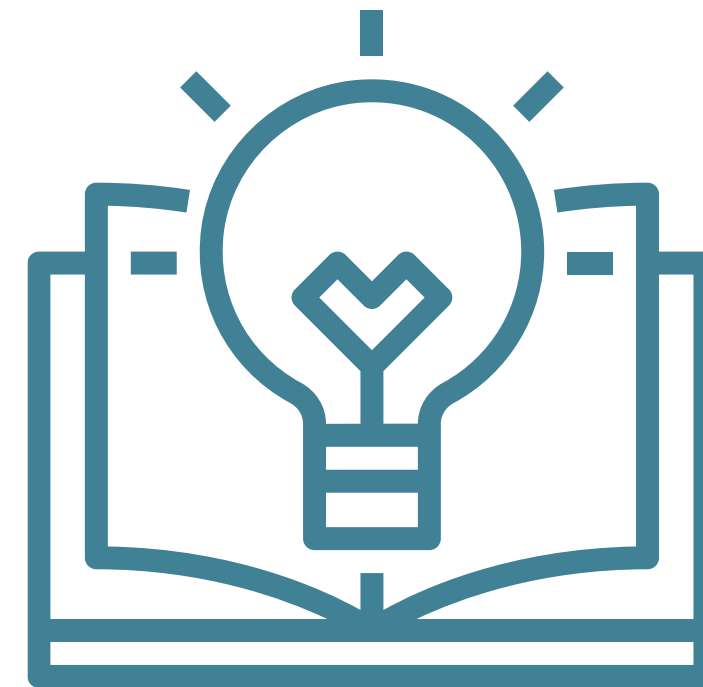
# SPREAD THE MESSAGE

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**Advocate**



**Educate**





# DETERMINE HOW TO MOVE FORWARD

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**1. Meet with Program Providers**

**2. Determine Funding Needs**

**3. Secure Funding**



# Questions?

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