



The A-PLUS Network

Advancing Principal Leadership in Urban Schools

A Professional Learning Community for Urban Principals



Improving teaching and learning in urban schools is not easy. Principals and their supervisors need the knowledge, skills, and understandings that will allow them to conceptualize, support, and ensure the continuous improvement of powerful improvement initiatives that result in measurably better teaching and learning, especially for the diverse populations of students served in urban schools (including English learners and students with disabilities). Based upon studies of the nation's highest performing urban schools, the A-PLUS Network is designed to support highly motivated principals in mastering these skills and generating improved learning outcomes quickly.

This two-year program engages principals in solving specific achievement challenges that confront their school. The program integrates on-site problem analysis, peer review and analysis, and consultations with principals of high-performing schools in a manner that supports principals in attaining improved learning results associated with a specific achievement challenge.

Nomination Process: Superintendents in selected urban districts are invited to nominate highly motivated principals who would like support in generating substantial, measurable improvements in academic achievement. With each nomination, the principal and superintendent must agree upon and specify a measurable goal (the achievement challenge) that will be the focus for the principal's two-year engagement in the network. NCUST will create networks of four to six schools with similar demographics and grade-level configurations.

Gap Analysis: At the beginning of each year, NCUST will work with each principal to conduct an analysis of the gap between current levels of performance and the achievement challenge the principal and superintendent specified. During this on-site visit, NCUST staff will observe classrooms, interview a sampling of school personnel, and examine school data. The school and the district will receive a brief report that outlines key issues that might be inhibiting the attainment of the achievement challenge and possible courses of action for addressing those issues. Principals will be supported as they work with their leadership teams, faculties, and communities to generate a plan of action for pursuing the achievement challenge.



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Network Meetings: Each network school will host two half-day meetings of the schools within the network per year. Thus, the members of the network will have eight to twelve meetings each year. These meetings will be scheduled for days that are convenient for the principals in the network. During each meeting, the host principal will describe their achievement challenge, current levels of performance, and efforts underway to improve performance. Also at each meeting, members of the network will visit classrooms, review performance data, and provide their network colleagues with constructive feedback about progress toward the achievement challenge. The meetings will be led by an NCUST Executive Coach with experience supporting school improvements. At two of the network meetings each year, NCUST will provide assistance from a principal of an NCUST award-winning school. The meetings will emphasize the curricular, instructional, and relational issues that influence school improvement.

All network principals and their immediate supervisors are invited to attend all meetings. The immediate supervisors must attend at least two meetings per year. The principal may not miss more than two meetings per year. Failure to meet these attendance expectations will result in removal from the network.

NCUST Symposium: In May of each year, NCUST hosts an annual symposium on high-performing schools. The symposium features nationally known keynote speakers and sessions from leaders of many of the nation's highest performing urban schools and districts. NCUST will pay symposium registration and travel costs for each network principal and the principal's immediate supervisor.

Costs: School districts in San Diego County will pay \$8,000 per year for each school's participation in the A-PLUS Network. Costs for districts in other cities will be adjusted to accommodate NCUST travel expenses. Districts might consider using professional development funds, school improvement funds, Title I resources, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds, or other appropriate sources to pay the fee for participation in the A-PLUS Network.

Anticipated Impact: We anticipate that most network schools will meet their achievement challenges or will make substantial progress. Additionally, principals and their supervisors will develop knowledge and skills related to the curricular, instructional, and relational issues that underlie successful improvement efforts. They will learn about the importance of helping individuals and groups (students, parents, teachers, support staff) perceive that planned initiatives will help them succeed. As well, they will learn strategies for assessing the fidelity of implementation (of whatever improvement initiative they pursue) and the importance of using benchmark assessments to gauge changes in student performance for each demographic group served. Many educational leaders have become increasingly aware of the importance of data in addressing improvement efforts; however, only the most effective administrators seem to understand the nuances of how leaders use data in ways that systematically ensure progress toward learning goals. Network participants will develop this knowledge and practice these skills as they work to address one specific challenge; however, the lessons learned will be applicable to many challenges they seek to address in the future.