

MULTI-SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

AN OPPORTUNITY CULTURE MODEL

BY PUBLIC IMPACT

Opportunity Culture multi-school leaders (MSLs) are excellent principals with a record of high-growth student learning who lead a small group of two to eight related or closely located schools, for more pay, funded within the budgets of their schools.

Multi-school leaders lead a team of their schools’ principals. In some cases, the team also includes an instructional assistant principal or principal resident who leads a school with heavier, more direct instructional leadership by the MSL. The leadership team reviews data for each school and for the group of schools overall to determine the best instructional, behavioral, and operational approaches to achieve student success. The MSL provides substantial guidance and support to each school’s top instructional leader. The MSL’s small group of schools may be called a multi-school team, zone, cluster, pod, group, or another name the district chooses.

Each school has at least one schoolwide instructional leader: principal, instructional assistant principal, or principal resident (see below for details). Large schools may have two or more of these instructional leaders: a principal, one or more instructional assistant principals, and, in some cases, a principal resident. The multi-school leader typically continues to directly lead at least one school—in some cases two—acting as its senior instructional leader, with the help of an instructional assistant principal or principal resident.

The cornerstone of Multi-School Leadership is instructional leadership within each school by multi-classroom leaders (MCLs). MCLs are accountable teacher-leaders with a track record of high-growth student learning who lead small grade or subject teams. MCLs provide substantial guidance and support to their teams, while still teaching part of the time. MCLs work as a team to help principals lead instruction, behavior policies, attendance policies, and other critical aspects affecting learning in each school. Research indicates that Multi-Classroom Leadership produces substantial learning gains by teachers whom MCLs lead.¹

Because MCLs provide schoolwide leadership, schools can reduce the number of other school leadership positions to fund multi-school leader pay and stay within school budgets. Schools may swap an assistant principal (AP) position for an operations manager; some have no principal, just an AP or principal resident who reports directly to the multi-school leader. Large schools may keep additional assistant principals, or principal residents, to guide and coach a portion of MCLs or to lead other functions.

Multi-school leaders differ from typical district leaders—area, zone, or assistant superintendents, and principal supervisors—both because of the **small number of schools they lead**, allowing

intensive leadership and coaching, and because their leadership team of principals is **supported by multi-classroom leaders in each school**. MSLs are focused on achieving strong student learning and teacher satisfaction, rather than on district administrative policies. MSLs report to a principal supervisor, such as an area, assistant, or zone superintendent (depending on the district size and structure), reducing the spans of these leaders, too—who may now be called **executive multi-school leaders**.

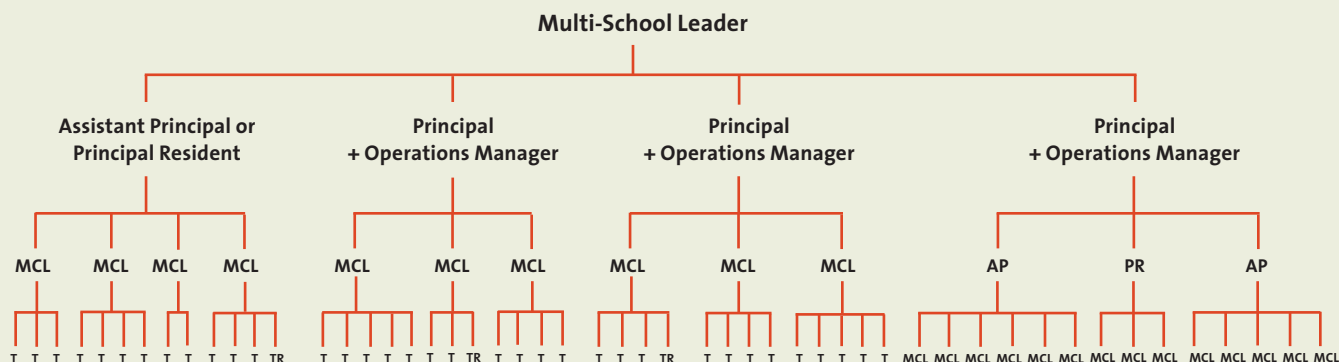
Multi-School Leadership serves to:

- * **Reach more teachers and their students** with excellent leadership
- * **Let outstanding principals advance with higher pay**, while continuing to lead instructional excellence
- * **Help all principals and teachers continuously improve** their leadership and instruction
- * **Retain principals longer** by helping them handle the job well and succeed with students
- * **Build a strong pipeline of excellent instructional leaders**, with a career path for development (below):



MULTI-SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: TEAMS OF LEADERS ACROSS AND WITHIN SCHOOLS

Multi-school leaders (MSLs) lead teams of 2 to 8 **principals**, setting a teamwide vision and developing members' instructional and administrative leadership. Most schools have an **operations manager** to run noninstructional functions. An MSL may lead one school directly with an **assistant principal (AP)** or **principal resident (PR)**; large schools may have instructional APs and a principal resident, as well as an operations manager, working under a principal. Each principal, principal resident, and instructional AP leads a team of 3 to 8 **multi-classroom leaders (MCLs)**. MCLs teach part of the time while leading a grade-level or subject team of 2 to 8 **teachers (T)** and **teacher residents (TR)**. Everyone collaborates to ensure that all students excel.



ROLE CHANGES IN MULTI-SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Districts, or zones within them, make the following changes from standard school design, allowing excellent principals to lead a group of two to six schools typically, and up to eight schools for proven multi-school leaders:

- * **One assistant principal (AP) position per school is replaced with an operations manager.** An operations manager handles non-instructional school operations and administration, and does not require certification. This is an advanced role for highly organized support staff and lateral-entry human services office managers. The operations manager position pays less than an AP role, consistent with other human services office managers.
- * **Some schools may instead keep an instructional AP position or principal resident without a principal; the AP or resident then reports directly to the multi-school leader,** who manages instruction more heavily and directly in that school. The AP or resident may manage a subset of the school's MCLs or co-lead the MCL team with the multi-school leader. In most cases, the MSL must continue to lead one school directly in order to fund the base salary (before supplements are added for additional schools led) for the MSL role. An operations manager from a neighboring school in the MSL's group may provide some operational and administrative support, using the same routines and processes across schools, as needed.

- * **In large schools with multiple APs, one AP position may be replaced with an operations manager while other APs continue to co-lead instruction** with the principal. In some years, a principal resident may fill a vacant assistant principal position.

These changes help top schoolwide leaders focus on a cohesive set of responsibilities, provide a leadership career path, and save money to fund Multi-School Leadership. In most cases, a seamless transition to this model can come through natural attrition and the shifting of staff into new roles in which each person can excel.

OPPORTUNITY CULTURE PRINCIPLES:

For Principals Extending Their Reach as Multi-School Leaders

Teams of principals and district/network leaders must tailor roles, budgets, and school operations to:

1. Reach more schools with excellent principals and their teams
2. Pay principals more for extending their reach
3. Fund pay within regular budgets
4. Provide protected in-school time and clarity about how to use it for planning, collaboration, and development —throughout all of the multi-school leader's schools
5. Match authority and accountability to each person's responsibilities

Roles Within Multi-School Leadership

Multi-School Leaders are proven, excellent principals who lead a group of related schools, typically two to six schools, and up to eight. New MSLs lead up to four schools. The group may be schools at the same level (elementary, middle, high), closely located, or with similar student needs. Multi-school leaders who previously led a schoolwide multi-classroom leadership team to achieve high-growth student learning are best suited for this role. MSLs provide heavy guidance and coaching to all their schools' principals, assistant principals, and principal residents.

MSLs:

- * guide each school's top instructional leader in critical elements of instructional and administrative leadership
- * observe and give feedback
- * coach
- * lead data analysis and problem-solving for the multi-school team
- * are accountable for student learning growth, teacher satisfaction, and other critical measures in all schools led.

MSLs lead principals as a team. The team may include an instructional assistant principal or principal resident who reports directly to the MSL. This **team of leaders** meets weekly or every other week to share school and group performance data, identify problems, and generate solutions. The team members' main focus is on **ensuring strong instructional, disciplinary, and related practices**, by leading their respective school's multi-classroom leader team.

As well as meeting with the whole team, MSLs meet weekly or every other week with individual principals, and any assistant principals and/or residents who report directly to them. They rotate working in person in the schools they lead, so they can connect personally with teachers, other staff, students, and families.

Principals are the top instructional and operational leaders within most of the individual schools. They play a traditional principal role, but they are guided by the multi-school leader and supported by an operations manager (for operations and administration) and a team of multi-classroom leaders (for instruction). Principals preferably have served as a multi-classroom leader and/or have supervised multi-classroom leaders as an assistant principal or principal resident, achieving high-growth learning in those capacities.

Assistant Principals are assisting while learning to lead instruction and operations within individual schools.

In each school that retains a principal, one AP position is swapped for an operations manager. The team of multi-classroom leaders leads instruction with the principal.

However, some APs may become the top instructional leader of a school in a multi-school group. When an assistant principal is the school's top instructional leader, the AP works directly under

a multi-school leader rather than a principal, typically on a career path toward becoming principal; this typically applies only to one or two schools in an MSL's group of schools.

Even when one AP position is swapped for an operations manager, larger schools may keep their existing, additional APs, to lead a small (preferably four to six) sub-team of multi-classroom leaders covering part of the school, or to lead other aspects of operations.

APs preferably have served as multi-classroom leaders who achieved high-growth student learning.

Principal Residents are training to become schoolwide instructional leaders, ideally following years as multi-classroom leaders who achieved high-growth learning. Principal residents are typically pursuing an advanced degree, and the residency counts as credit toward their degree. The residency is full-time, full-year, and fully accountable for school-level results when reporting directly to the multi-school leader, or results for a portion of a large school when reporting to a principal. Residents operate with heavy supervision and guidance by a multi-school leader or a principal led by an MSL. One school in a team may have a principal resident (or AP) who reports directly to the MSL; additional residents may report to principals in large schools with several AP positions.

Residents are typically paid on the AP compensation schedule.

Operations Managers lead the operational, administrative, and logistical functions in a school. Some may support two contiguous

Changing the Role of Assistant Principal

With multi-classroom leaders leading instruction schoolwide, the role of many assistant principals (APs) changes. Some APs with substantial experience leading instruction and operations—ideally in a school with multi-classroom leaders—may become principals immediately when a district shifts to multi-school leadership.

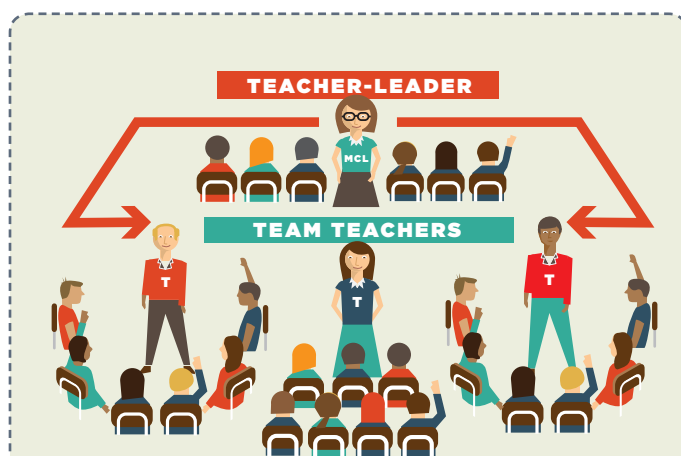
Other APs may return to the classroom as multi-classroom leaders, in many cases with similar pay, to strengthen their instructional leadership before advancing further.

A small number of schools—one or two per MSL team—may have no principal, just an assistant principal who reports directly to a multi-school leader; the MSL then provides heavier, more direct instructional leadership in these schools.

Finally, in larger schools with multiple AP positions, some APs will remain in more traditional AP roles—reporting to the principal and either leading instruction through a portion of the school's multi-classroom leaders or performing other management or administrative duties.

or closely located schools in the same multi-school group. Operations managers within a multi-school leader's group may collaborate to improve operational efficiency and the level of support for the group's instructional vision, provided through operational and administrative functions. For example, operations managers may oversee transportation, the cafeteria, the school building, equipment, technology, purchasing, schedule design and implementation (in coordination with the instructional leadership team), some aspects of discipline, and noninstructional compliance paperwork.

Multi-Classroom Leaders in each school lead small instructional teams, typically of three to six teachers, and up to eight teachers, covering the four core subjects, at least, schoolwide. Responsible for achieving high growth for all students the teaching team serves, a multi-classroom leader determines how students spend time and tailors the team teachers' roles according to their strengths. A multi-classroom leader models, co-teaches, co-plans, and co-improves instruction throughout the team, while continuing to teach students part of the time. All of a school's MCLs operate as a schoolwide instructional leadership team, led by the top instructional leader. MCLs may report to the principal, in a typical school, or an instructional assistant principal or principal resident.



MULTI-CLASSROOM LEADERSHIP

A multi-classroom leader (MCL) is a teacher with leadership skills and a record of high-growth student learning who both teaches part of the time and leads a small, collaborative team of teachers for a group of classrooms in the same grade or subject. MCLs share and collaboratively improve instructional strategies and their most effective practices for classroom success. Teaching teams collaborate and plan together through careful scheduling and, in some cases, supervision of students by paraprofessionals ("Reach Associates") or teaching residents. Accountable for achieving high growth for all classrooms in the group, the MCL determines how students spend time and tailors team teachers' roles according to their strengths.

IMPACT ON SCHOOLS & STUDENTS

Under Multi-School Leadership, more schools provide excellent instruction to all students schoolwide, in core subjects and other content areas each school values most. To do this, each school must have effective leadership of a schoolwide team of multi-classroom leaders, who guide and support teachers in small grade and subject teams, for more pay, within each school's budget.

Research indicates that Multi-Classroom Leadership produces substantial learning gains, helping teams with a typical range of teachers produce learning growth matching or approaching that of top-quartile teachers.²

Additionally, with Multi-School Leadership, operations and administrative functions more consistently support teachers' efforts to provide excellent instruction schoolwide.

District-Level Changes

Districts can extend this small-team leadership upward, adding *executive multi-school leaders* to manage small teams of multi-school leaders, rather than having the unmanageable spans common among principal supervisors in many districts. These changes do not increase budget demands, as changes can be funded by having non-certified staff members manage schools' noninstructional operations and logistics.

CAREER PATH AND COMPENSATION, WITHIN BUDGET

Career Path

The instructional leadership career path progresses from Multi-Classroom Leadership to Multi-School Leadership to Executive Multi-School Leadership, adding roles that allow for small-team leadership of instructional excellence at all levels (see Figure 2, page 6).

Pay increases with the level of responsibility and reach, but team sizes remain small within schools and across the multi-school group. A multi-classroom leader (or similar teacher-leader) moving up spends multiple years as, first, a principal resident (while obtaining an advanced degree) and then an instructional assistant principal. As an instructional AP, the individual may report directly to the multi-school leader or, in a large school, to a principal on the MSL's team. Then the individual may move up to a principal position.

Compensation

Educators earn more for their leadership without adding to school budgets and without cutting anyone else's pay. Multi-school leaders can earn supplements above principal pay—10 to 40 percent of average principal pay is well within most budgets—depending on the number of schools they lead and local costs of human services organization office managers. All pay supplements are funded

Small-Team Instructional Leadership Supports Everyone

The Opportunity Culture multi-classroom leader is the foundation of a **cascade of small-team leadership** from senior district leadership (executive multi-school leaders) all the way into classrooms—without adding costs. Educators get more guidance, feedback, and support to improve instruction and instructional leadership. By the time some teachers become principals, they have had **substantial, prolonged leadership experience helping others achieve and lead instructional excellence.**

As more leaders progress through these roles, teachers have increasingly skilled leaders at all levels guiding and supporting them, year after year. A common vision and grasp of how to achieve consistent instructional excellence—and the student learning that follows—can be realized day to day, throughout far more classrooms and whole schools.

Not only do teachers and principals receive better guidance and support, this structure also allows schools to have teacher and principal residents in full-year, full-pay roles that develop their instructional and leadership skills on the job. Cooperating graduate schools may count a principal residency (essentially, a year as a supervised instructional AP) in an Opportunity Culture school toward master’s degrees, preparing aspiring principals to lead a team of teacher-leaders.

within the total budgets of the schools in the group, which focuses the MSL on providing instructional leadership for principals and increases the role’s stability through superintendent turnover.

When a school swaps an assistant principal position for an operations manager position, it saves an estimated 15 to 30 percent of the AP pay, on average. If more than one school in an MSL group has an AP or principal resident reporting directly to the MSL, then the group saves even more money, even when adding an operations manager to such a school. These savings all go into a pool that funds a pay supplement for the multi-school leader, which increases with the number of schools led.

For example, a pay supplement of 10 percent (of average principal pay) for leading two schools, and 7.5 percent more for each additional school led, fits well within the estimated savings. These levels of pay also fit into a natural sequence of small-team leadership from the classroom up through the superintendency: No leader is left struggling to lead large numbers of teachers or schools. And no professional is left without guidance and support to excel at work. See Figure 2, page 6, for details.

FIGURE 1. Opportunity Culture Instruction & Leadership Path

Teachers progress by achieving student learning growth, reaching more students in teams, and leading colleagues to help everyone excel collaboratively.

Principals progress by achieving student learning growth, reaching more schools with a team, and leading teachers and other principals to help everyone excel collaboratively.

Level	Role
15	Superintendent
14	Assistant Superintendent*
13	Executive Multi-School Leader*
12	Multi-School Leader II
11	Multi-School Leader I
10	Principal
9	Assistant Principal and/or Principal Resident
8	Multi-Classroom Leader II
7	Multi-Classroom Leader I
6	Master Team Reach Teacher II
5	Master Team Reach Teacher I
4	Team Reach Teacher II
3	Team Reach Teacher I
2	Team Teacher
1	Classroom Teacher
0	Teacher Resident

*These roles may have multiple levels.

The operations manager position, which does not require certification or instructional training, is on a different pay schedule commensurate with local human services office managers. In some cases, this may open a career path for highly organized teaching assistants and reach associates who have demonstrated strong organizational and logistical prowess by supporting large teaching teams and through other school activities.

SCHEDULE CRITERIA

Multi-school leaders’ schedules must include time to:

- * Conduct data analysis, planning, and professional development with the team of principals (and an instructional AP or principal resident in one or two schools led directly), at least every other week
- * Do the following in each school, on a rotating schedule, at least every other week:
 - Observe the instructional leadership team (which includes multi-classroom leaders) in its planning and improvement process

FIGURE 2. Opportunity Culture Leader Career Path Example

Level	Min. Experience	Qualifications (Q) & Performance (P)	Pay Supplement
<p>Executive Multi-School Leader (EMSL)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads a small team of multi-school leaders (MSLs) to achieve excellent instruction throughout multiple groups of schools. Small-span EMSLs may lead 3–4 MSLs for a total of about 12–20 schools via MSLs. Large-span EMSLs may lead 5–8 MSLs for a total of approximately 21–35 schools via MSLs. <i>Funded by regular district budget.</i> 	3 years as multi-school leader	<p>Q: Excellent rating/high growth across group of schools in 2 of 3 years as multi-school leader of at least 4 schools. Leadership competencies demonstrated.</p> <p>P: Maintains excellent rating/high growth in 2 of 3 years throughout schools led</p>	Depends on span and related district executive pay ranges
<p>Multi-School Leader (MSL)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads a team of principals—typically 2–6 and up to 8 principals; up to 4 for new MSLs. May also continue to lead one or two schools directly with an assistant principal or principal resident. Ensures instructional excellence and operational efficiency in all schools led. <i>Funded by trading an AP position for an operations manager to lead noninstructional operations and administration; and by managing an AP/resident directly</i> 	3 years as principal, with at least 2 in an Opportunity Culture school	<p>Q: Excellent rating/high growth in 2 of 3 years as principal, ideally in an Opportunity Culture school with multi-classroom leaders schoolwide. Leadership competencies demonstrated.</p> <p>P: Maintains excellent rating/high growth in 2 of 3 years throughout schools led</p>	10–40% of average principal pay**
<p>Principal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads schoolwide team of multi-classroom leaders. Reports to multi-school leader. Large schools may have an assistant principal to assist with instructional leadership. <i>Funded by regular school budget</i> 	3 years combined as principal, assistant principal and/or resident	<p>Q: Excellent rating/high growth in 2 of 3 years as principal resident/AP. Leadership competencies demonstrated.</p> <p>P: Maintains excellent rating/high growth in 2 of 3 years.</p>	Standard principal salary schedule
<p>Assistant Principal/Principal Resident</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads schoolwide team of multi-classroom leaders. Reports to multi-school leader. In large schools, may report to a principal and provide instructional leadership of a MCL team. <i>Funded by regular school budget.</i> 	3 years as MCL I or MCL II	<p>Q: Excellent rating/high growth in 2 of 3 prior years as MCL.</p> <p>P: Maintains high growth in 2 of 3 years.</p>	Standard assistant principal salary schedule
<p>Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL) II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads teaching team of 6–8 teachers while continuing to teach, typically part of the time. Ultimately responsible for organizing the roles, steps and elements of the team’s curriculum, lessons, teaching, data analysis, and improvement; coaches and develops team. May have one or two MRTs to assist with leadership and direct reach. <i>Funded by reallocation of instructional support staff and/or by team efficiency/reach.</i> 	2–3 years as MCL I	<p>Q: Excellent rating/high growth in 2 of 3 years as MCL I. Leadership competencies demonstrated.</p> <p>P: Maintains excellent rating/high growth in 2 of 3 years.</p>	30–50% of average teacher pay
<p>Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL) I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads teaching team of 2–5 teachers while teaching, typically part of the time. Ultimately responsible for organizing the roles, steps and elements of the team’s curriculum, lessons, teaching, data analysis, and improvement; coaches and develops team. <i>Funded by reallocation of instructional support staff and/or by team efficiency/reach.</i> 	3 years as Teacher, Team Teacher, or Team Reach Teacher	<p>Q: Excellent rating/high growth in 2 of 3 years as a teacher. Leadership competencies demonstrated.</p> <p>P: Maintains excellent rating/high growth in 2 of 3 years.</p>	20–30% of average teacher pay

*Pay supplement figures are examples only and are expressed as a percent of average pay in a district. Actual supplements may be fixed dollar amounts for easier school budgeting.
 **Range given is 10% for the second school and 7.5% more for each additional school.

- Observe the instructional and behavioral environment of the school, in classrooms and out
- Connect in person with staff and some students and families
- Convey the vision of the multi-school group through speaking and other communications
- * Give feedback, coach, and help solve problems one on one with each school's top instructional leader (principal, assistant principal, or principal resident)
- * Hold periodic check-ins with operations managers as a team to ensure that operations, administration, and logistics support the group's mission, goals, and values
- * Perform data analysis of the group overall and each school individually preceding group-wide leadership meetings
- * Do individual assessment and development planning for each school's top instructional leader.

Schedules should be set over each summer, so that schools may plan over the summer as well for their instructional leadership team meetings, grade/subject team meetings, and other key events. This prevents changes in student schedules once school has begun. See the [Multi-School Leader: Schedule Specifications](#).

OTHER OPERATIONAL CHANGES

Facilities: No changes needed. MSL needs a private place to meet with the top instructional leader and operations manager in each school at least every other week. MSL can join each schoolwide leadership team in its usual meeting room for group meetings.

Technology: MSL needs a laptop or similar mobile device, and an online platform for school leadership teams to load, display, and compare data on key measures for all of the group's schools (such as interim student learning growth and achievement, attendance, and discipline measures). This could be a simple program such as Excel, but more advanced platforms may allow easier comparisons. Schools need Internet access to examine shared data.

EXTENDING REACH

Multi-School Leadership extends the reach of excellent principals who achieve schoolwide high-growth learning to 200 to 800 percent of the students and teachers they can reach in traditional school models, with an expected four to six schools led on average, which translates to 400 to 600 percent reach.

Notes

1. An average range of teachers who joined teams led by multi-classroom leaders, or MCLs, (who had prior high growth as teachers) produced learning gains equivalent to those of teachers from the 75th to 85th percentile in math, and, in six of the seven statistical models, from 66th to 72nd percentile in reading. Teams had a median of five teachers in addition to the MCL. Student growth began to increase schoolwide after MCLs were added in only part of a school. Higher pay supplements for MCLs, provided through reallocations of school budgets, were associated with better outcomes for team teachers. For more information, see: Hansen, M., & Backes, B. (2018, January 25). New teaching model yields learning improvement for students in math [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2018/01/25/new-teaching-model-yields-learning-improvement-for-students-in-math/>

2. See note 1.

Acknowledgements

This was written by Emily Ayscue Hassel and Sharon Keschull Barrett, with production by Beverley Tyndall. Thank you to the many Public Impact team members who provided input and feedback.

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Please cite this publication as:

Public Impact: Hassel, E. A., and Barrett, S. K. (2018). *Multi-school leadership: An Opportunity Culture model*. Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact. Retrieved from http://opportunityculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Multi-School_Leadership_Model-Public_Impact.pdf

